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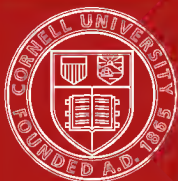
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SONGS OF SUMMER

BY

RICHARD HENRY STODDARD

“ When I walk by myself alone
It doth me good my songs to render.”
OLD PLAY.

BOSTON
TICKNOR AND FIELDS
M DCCC LVII

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RICHARD H. STODDARD,
In the Clerk's Office of the District Court of the District of
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Riverside, Cambridge,
Printed by H. O. HOUGHTON & Co.

TO GEORGE H. BOKER.



*Not mine the tragic poet's art,
His empire of the human heart :
That world is shut from me,
But you possess the key.*

*I see you in your wide domain,
Surrounded by a stately train,
That lived, and died of yore :
But now they die no more !*

*The Moor Calaynos : Anne Boleyn :
The Guzman and the cruel queen ;
And that unhappy Pair
That float in Hell's murk 'air !*

*Anon your bitter Fool appears,
Masking in mirth his cynic sneers ;
We hear his bells, and smile,
But long to weep the while.*

*A narrower range to me belongs,
A little land of summer songs,
A realm of thought apart
From all that wrings the heart.*

*To win you to my small estate,
Old friend, I greet you at the gate,
And from its fairest bower
Bring you this simple flower.*



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SONGS OF SUMMER.

*“ Songs are like painted window panes.
In darkness wrapt the church remains,
If from the market place we view it ;
Thus sees the ignoramus through it.
No wonder that he deems it tame,
And all his life ’twill be the same.*

*“ But let us now inside repair,
And greet the holy chapel there :
At once the whole seems clear and bright,
Each ornament is bathed in light,
And fraught with meaning to the sight.
God’s children ! thus your fortune prize,
Be edified, and feast your eyes.”*

GOETHE.

SONGS OF SUMMER.



THERE are gains for all our losses,
There are balms for all our pain :
But when youth, the dream, departs,
It takes something from our hearts,
And it never comes again.

We are stronger, and are better,
Under manhood's sterner reign :
Still we feel that something sweet
Followed youth, with flying feet,
And will never come again.

Something beautiful is vanished,
And we sigh for it in vain :
We behold it everywhere,
On the earth, and in the air,
But it never comes again !



[BRITAINY.]

THY father is a King, my child,
And thou a Prince by birth ;
But he has banished us from court
To roam about the earth :
But let him be that wrongeth thee,
For all the holy angels see ;
Said patient pale Custance.
[*“ Peace, little son, I will do thee no harm.”*
But still the babe lay weeping on her arm.]

From door to door we beg our bread,
From day to day we pine,
While he doth at his banquet sit,
And drain the cups of wine :
But let him be, oh let him be,
For God will care for you and me ;
Said patient pale Custance.
[*“ Peace, little son, I will do thee no harm.”*
But still the babe lay weeping on her arm.]



[ANTIQUE.]

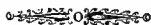
A FEW frail summers had touched thee,
As they touch the fruit ;
Not so bright as thy hair the sunshine,
Not so sweet as thy voice the lute :
Hushed the voice, shorn the hair ; all is over :
An urn of white ashes remains ;
Nothing else, save the tears in our eyes,
And our bitterest, bitterest pains.

We garland the urn with white roses,
Burn incense and gums on the shrine,
Play old tunes with the saddest of closes,
Dear tunes that were thine !
But in vain, all in vain,
Thou art gone — we remain !

THE SONG OF THE SYRENS.

LONG have you buffeted the winds,
And urged the weary oar :
Now you reach our little isle
Furl your sail, and rest awhile,
On the happy shore.

What is here that you should fear ?
What is there so deadly here ?
A quiet island in the sea,
Grass-fringed, and shadowed deep with palms :
Winds that winnow summer balms :
Flowers in each vale, and fruits on every tree !
We weave flow dances in the shade,
With lifted arms and floating hair :
Or, when the golden noon is come,
Lift the wild-bee's drowsy hum,
Or watch the insects in the air :
Or kiss each other on the lips,
And softly swoon away in Sleep's divine eclipse !
What is there to fear in this ?
Where's the danger of a kiss ?
But, if dangerous it be,
It is to maids like us, not to men like thee !



[ITALY.]

RANGE yourselves my merry men,
And wake your sweetest numbers ;
My lady will forgive the voice
That melts her silent slumbers :
For ladies listen with delight
To music in the summer night.

Run your hands across the strings,
Like the wind through vernal rains,
Softly : not of lovers' fears,
Nor their idle rain of tears —
Sing serener strains :
Sing the joy, the happy smart,
In a little maiden's heart,
That finds in dreams her lover dear,
And wakes — to find him near !

THE SEA.

[STORM.]

THROUGH the night, through the night,
In the saddest unrest,
Wrapt in white, all in white,
With her babe on her breast,
Walks the mother so pale,
Staring out on the gale,
Through the night!

Through the night, through the night,
Where the sea lifts the wreck,
Land in sight, close in sight,
On the surf-flooded deck,
Stands the father so brave,
Driving on to his grave,
Through the night!

THE SHADOW OF THE HAND.

[ITALY.]

You were very charming, Madam,
In your silks and satins fine ;
And you made your lovers drunken,
But it was not with your wine !
There were court-gallants in dozens,
There were princes of the land,
And they would have perished for you,
As they knelt and kissed your hand ;
For they saw no stain upon it,
It was such a snowy hand !

But for me — I knew you better,
And, while you were flaunting there,
I remembered some one lying
With the blood on his white hair !
He was pleading for you, Madam,
Where the shriven spirits stand :
But the Book of Life was darkened
By the Shadow of a Hand !
It was tracing your perdition,
For the blood upon your hand !

THE SPEECH OF LOVE.

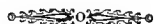
You ask me, love, to sing of you,
Dear heart! but what and why?
Songs are but sweet and skilful words,
That tinkle unto certain chords,
And are but born to die.

Words can not show my burning love,
My passion's secret fire:
I try to speak, and make it plain,
About my pleasure, and my pain,
But song and speech expire.

There is more eloquence in looks,
More poesy in sighs,
Than ever yet in speech was framed,
Or any song of poet famed,
Though lit at ladies' eyes.

Then bid me sing of love no more,
But let me silent be;
For silence is the speech of love,
The music of the spheres above,
That suits a soul like thee.

.



You may drink to your leman in gold,
In a great golden goblet of wine ;
She's as ripe as the wine, and as bold
As the glare of the gold :
But this little lady of mine—
I will not profane her in wine.
I go where the garden so still is,
(The moon raining through,)
To pluck the white bowls of the lilies,
And drink her in dew !



THE SEA.

[THE LOVER.]

You stooped and picked a wreathèd shell,
Beside the shining sea :
“ This little shell, when I am gone,
Will whisper still of me.”
I kissed your hands, upon the sands,
For you were kind to me !

I hold the shell against my ear,
And hear its hollow roar :
It speaks to me about the sea,
But speaks of you no more.
I pace the sands, and wring my hands,
For you are kind no more !

BIRDS.

BIRDS are singing round my window,
Tunes the sweetest ever heard,
And I hang my cage there daily,
But I never catch a bird.

So with thoughts my brain is peopled,
And they sing there all day long :
But they will not fold their pinions
In the little cage of song!



THE LOST LAMB.

[TARTARY.]

THE little Tartar maiden
That tends my master's sheep —
She makes a lamb her pillow,
When she lies down to sleep.

She parts her gray tent-curtains
Before the morn is seen,
And drives our flocks together,
To pastures fresh and green.

My heart goes with the maiden,
For when I wake I find
No heart within my bosom,
No happy peace of mind.

I track the lost lamb's footsteps,
And find it fast asleep,
Beside the little maiden
Among my master's sheep.

THE SEA.

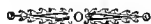
[THE WIFE.]

I PACE the sands from morn till night,
But the sail I seek is never in sight :
Will it ever come ? shall I ever see
The man so dear to my babe and me ?

When the sky is bright, and the waves are calm,
And the warm wind flows like a sea of balm,
“ He lives,” I think ; “ He comes ! ” I say :
But he comes not, though I watch all day.

O sun ! my heart goes down with thee !
For who can bear the night, and the sea ?
The lonely sky and the moaning waves—
They make us think of our sailors’ graves !

I pace and pace the desolate shore,
But he comes no more, he comes no more :
He never will come to my babe and me,
He is lost in the deep and cruel sea !



THE sky is a drinking cup,
That was overturned of old,
And it pours in the eyes of men
Its wine of airy gold !

We drink that wine all day,
Till the last drop is drained up,
And are lighted off to bed
By the jewels in the cup !



ON THE PIER.

Down at the end of the long dark freet,
Years, years ago,
I sat with my sweetheart on the pier,
Watching the river flow.

The moon was climbing the sky that night,
White as the winter's snow :
We kissed in its light, and swore to be true—
But that was years ago !

Once more I walk in the dark old freet,
Wearily to and fro :
But I sit no more on the desolate pier
Watching the river flow.



SPRING, they tell me, comes in bloom,
Flowers already star the lea :
But thou art lying in thy tomb,
And there is no Spring for me.
Skies are gay
Day after day,
And the snow-drifts melt away :
But there is no Spring for me,
Perdita.

Over thee the willows wave,
And the waning moon doth shine :
But thou art happy in thy grave,
And I would I were in mine.
Heart and brain
Are racked with pain,
For I seek thy grave again :
But I soon shall rest in mine,
Perdita !



THE gray old Earth goes on
At its ancient pace,
Lifting its thunder-voice
In the choir of space ;
And the years as they go
Are singing flow,
Solemn dirges, full of wo !

Tyrants sit upon their thrones,
And will not hear the people's moans,
Nor hear their clanking chains :
Or, if they do, they add thereto,
And mock, not ease their pains.

But little liberty remains,
There is but little room for thee,
In this wide world, O Liberty !
But where thy foot has once been set
Thou wilt remain, though oft unseen :

And grow like thought, and move like wind,
Upon the troubled sea of Mind,

No longer now serene.

Thy life and strength thou dost retain,
Despite the cell, the rack, the pain,
And all the battles won in vain !

And even now thou see'st the hour
That lays in dust the thrones of Power :
When man shall once again be free,
And Earth renewed, and young like thee,
O Liberty ! O Liberty !





THERE is no sin to hearts that love,
 Whatever men may say ;
For they are lifted far above
 The laws of lesser clay.

They are unto themselves a law,
 No other law can bind :
No other wakes a moment's awe,
 For meaner men designed.

Then tell me not 'tis love that parts,
 Nor fear the powers above ;
For all the sins of loving hearts
 Are washed away by love !

THE KING MUSES.

NAY, keep your seats, I pray ; let no one stir :
The banquet's just begun. Slaves, fill their cups,
And stand behind their chairs with flasks of wine.
For me, my lords, I mean to walk awhile,
And think my thoughts. Come off, my kingly crown !
You chafe my temples with your golden round,
And turn my hair to silver : so, lie there.
And now I doff my robe. Drink, gentlemen.
Good Fool, put on this weary robe and crown,
And play the King. Had I a wreath of flowers,
Such as the country maids do wear in spring,
Fresh wild flowers, cool with dew, I'd crown myself.
But why pluck flowers to bind a few gray hairs ?
Before the year is out a whited skull
Will be the lordliest thing that's left of me.
Away with all this show ! this well-piled board,
These glittering lamps, music, and song and wine !
Bring me a robe of sackcloth, one of you,
Another strew some ashes on the ground.
When you have finished feasting, gentlemen,
You'll find me with the leper at my gates.

THE DIVAN.

[PERSIA.]

I.

A LITTLE maid of Afrakan,
An idol on a silk divan ;
She sits so still, and never speaks,
She holds a cup of mine ;
'Tis full of wine, and on her cheeks
Are stains and smears of wine !

II.

Thou little girl of Afrakan,
I join thee on the silk divan :
There is no need to seek the land,
The rich bazaars where rubies shine ;
For mines are in that little hand,
And on those little cheeks of thine !

THE TRESS OF BROWN HAIR TO THE POET.

HERE I lie, a tress of hair,
Kissed by every wandering air,
Wishing you would kiss me too :
Why don't you, oftener than you do ?
Through my ringlets ran her fingers,
Whom you love so fond and true ;
And their sweetness lingers, lingers
In the ringlets still for you.

Only kiss them once, and see
What love lies embalmed in me !
Kiss me now, and it shall seem
As if you kissed her, in a dream ;
Nay ! it shall not seem, but be :
You shall kiss her, sir, and she—
She shall stand before you there,
Pale and fair,
By only kissing me, a little tress of hair !



THE sky is thick upon the sea,
The sea is sown with rain,
And in the passing gulfs we hear
The clanging of the crane.

The cranes are flying to the south ;
We cut the northern foam :
The dreary land they leave behind
Must be our future home.

Its barren shores are long and dark,
And gray its autumn sky ;
But better these, than this gray sea,
If but to land—and die !

THE FALCON.

IN-DOORS in a summer day, like this,
I pine with a fancied wrong ;
But out in the sunshine, out in the wind,
My soul is a falcon strong.

The brave bright sun, so merry and old—
He lends his strength to my wings,
And I soar till I see the golden gate,
Where the lark at morning sings.

But let my lady summon me back,
I come, as a falcon should,
Out of the sunshine, out of the wind,
And yield my eyes to the hood !

DAY AND NIGHT.

DAY is the Child of Time,
And Day must cease to be :
But Night is without a sire,
And can not expire,
One with Eternity.

Day and the angel Life
Circle the worlds of air,
With a speed that looks not back ;
For Night is on their track,
Clutching their golden hair !

She comes, she comes again,
In her dark and pitiless flight ;
The baby Sleep on her arm reclined,
The skeleton Death behind—
The Shadow that haunts the night !

THE DEAD.

I THINK about the dead by day,
I dream of them at night :
They seem to stand beside my chair,
Clad in the clothes they used to wear,
And by my bed in white.

The common-places of their lives,
The lightest words they said,
Revive in me, and give me pain,
And make me with them back again,
Or with that I were dead.

I would be kinder to them now,
Were they alive once more ;
Would kiss their cheeks, and kiss their hair,
And love them, like the angels there,
Upon the silent shore.

I know not where ye are, ye dead !
My dead, so dear to me !
In your low graves, in heaven, or hell :
But where you dwell I long to dwell,
With you I pine to be !

THE SEA.

[MAID.]

By the rolling waves I roam,
And look along the sea,
And dream of the day, and the gleaming sail
That bore my love from me.

His bark now sails the Indian seas,
Far down in the tropic zone :
But his thoughts, like swallows, fly to me,
By the northern waves alone.

Nor will he delay, when winds are fair
To waft him back to me :
But haste, my love ! or my grave will be made
By the sad and moaning sea !



MANY's the time I've sighed for summer,
Many's the summer I've known ;
But to-day I cling to the flying spring,
And fear to have it flown.
Not that May is gay,
For the sky is cold and gray,
And a shadow creeps on the day :
But the laden summer will give me,
What it never gave before ;
Or take from me what a thousand
Summers can give no more !



THE GIPSY TOAD.

[BOHEMIA.]

ACROSS the haunted moor I went,
Wrapt in the glooms of discontent :
The weeds were thick, the grass was sere,
Because the gipsy's toad was near.

It cowered beside the marfhy road ;
Its eye with devilish cunning glowed :
I ftamped, and ftamped it in the mud,
Until my feet were red with blood.

Then on I went with hurried tramp,
Until I reached the gipsy camp :
Great was the ftir and sorrow there,
And the old Queen tore her ragged hair !

“ What is the matter, old Mother Crawl ? ”
She answered me not, but raised her fhawl :
A trampled body, a mangled head—
Jesu ! the gipsy's child was dead !

A SERENADE.

[FRANCE.]

THERE'S a door in your chamber, lady mine,
I, the King, have the key :
There's a walk in my garden's deepest shade,
For you, Sweet, and me.

We are royal and distant by day,
When the world is in sight :
But at night we have hearts, and we love,
And are happy at night.

The lamps have gone out, lady mine,
All is still : let us rise :
I can track you by the beat of your heart,
And the light of your eyes.

Through the dusk of the lindens we'll glide,
To that alley of ours :
And kiss in the light of the moon,
And the odor of flowers.



THE house is dark and dreary,
And my heart is full of gloom ;
But out of doors, in the blessed air,
The sun is warm, the sky is fair,
And the flowers are still in bloom.

A moment ago in the garden
I scattered the shining dew :
The wind was soft in the swaying trees,
The morning-glories were full of bees,
And straight in my face they flew !

Yet I left them unmolested,
Draining their honey-wine,
And entered the weary house again,
To sit, as now, by a bed of pain,
With a fevered hand in mine.



[ANTIQUE.]

THE phantom that walks in the sun,
The terror that creeps in the air,
Has entered the Garden of Youth,
And vainly we look for thee there :
Thy spirit has vanished, but where ?

I question the wind of the summer,
That blows o'er the land and the sea ;
It gives me a moan for my moan,
But no tidings of thee :
Nor answer the stars in the skies,
Pining still for the light of thine eyes !



WERE I A BIRD.

WERE I a little wingéd bird,
As I desire to be,
I would not live another day
In this dark city, but away
To lands beyond the sea.

I'd build my nest in some old wood,
From other nests apart :
No wing among the boughs would be
So swift as mine, no song so free,
So pure no human heart.

The sunlight dripping through the leaves :
The merry leaves at play :
The rain drops pattering on the roof :
The queenly moon : the pearly woof
That paves her nightly way :

This, and the bliss that music gives,
The rarest ever heard ;
From every bird a song divine,
To answer mine — all would be mine,
Were I a happy bird.

But now—I'm very like a bird,
Above this ledger's page :
And these dry mafts are woods along
The sounding sea, and this a song :
The city is my cage !



THE NIGHT BEFORE THE BRIDAL.

THE bridal flower you gave me,
The rose so pure and white—
I press it to my lips, dear,
With tears of soft delight.

Its odor is so heavy
It makes me faint and pine :
It is thy kiss that freights it,
That sweet, sweet love of thine !

To-morrow thou wilt give me,
For a spell of joy and power,
The hand that gave the rose-bud,
And thy heart, a richer flower.

Then this may fade, and wither,
No longer kissed by me,
For these, my burning kisses,
Will then be showered on thee !



DIM grows the sky, and dusk the air,
And shadows settle everywhere,
Save when the embers streak the wall
With flames, that soon in darkness fall.

Pensive I sit, relapsing fast
Into the dead, the silent Past :
The Past returns, the dead are here ;
Was that a whisper in my ear ?

No ! dear one, no ! I did not sigh ;
Nor does a tear bedim mine eye :
'Twas the officious light you brought,
And something alien to my thought.
But even if my tears *do* flow,
I weep for pleasure, not for wo :
I weep—because I love you so !

SUMMER AND AUTUMN.

THE hot mid-summer, the bright mid-summer
Reigns in its glory now :
The earth is scorched with a golden fire,
There are berries, dead-ripe, on every brier,
And fruits on every bough.

But the autumn days, so sober and calm,
Steeped in a dreamy haze ;
When the uplands all with harvests shine,
And we drink the wind like a fine cool wine —
Ah ! those are the best of days !



THE HELMET.

[GERMANY.]

WHERE the standards waved the thickest,
And the tide of battle rolled,
Furiously he charged the foemen,
On his snow-white steed so bold ;
But he wore no guarding helmet,
Only his long hair of gold !

“ Turn, and fly ! thou rash young warrior,
Or this iron helmet wear.”
“ Nay ! but I am armed already,
In the brightness of my hair ;
For my mother kissed its tresses,
With the holy lips of prayer ! ”



ROSES AND THORNS.

THE young child Jesus had a garden,
Full of roses, rare and red :
And thrice a day he watered them,
To make a garland for his head.

When they were full-blown in the garden,
He called the Jewish children there,
And each did pluck himself a rose,
Until they stripped the garden bare.

“And now how will you make your garland ?
For not a rose your path adorns.”
“But you forget,” he answered them,
“That you have left me still the thorns.”

They took the thorns, and made a garland,
And placed it on his shining head ;
And where the roses should have shone
Were little drops of blood instead !



BENEATH the heavy curtains,
My face against the pane,
I peer into the darkness,
And scan the night in vain.

The vine o'erruns the lattice,
And lies along its roof,
So thick with leaves and clusters
It keeps the moon aloof.

By yonder pear-tree splintered
The feeble radiance falls,
But fails to pierce the branches,
Or touch the sombre walls.

No moon, no starlight gleaming,
The dark encircles me ;
And, what is more annoying,
My neighbor cannot see.

She stands beneath her curtains,
Her face against the pane,
Nor knows that I am watching
For her to-night again.



RATTLE the window, Winds !
Rain, drip on the panes !
There are tears and sighs in our hearts and eyes,
And a weary weight on our brains.

The gray sea heaves and heaves,
On the dreary flats of sand ;
And the blasted limb of the churchyard yew —
It shakes like a ghostly hand !

The dead are engulfed beneath it,
Sunk in the grassy waves :
But we have more dead in our hearts to-day
Than the Earth in all her graves !

THE VEILED STATUE.

THERE'S a statue in my chamber,
Carved in other years for me,
From the memory of a lady
In a land beyond the sea.

In its niche I keep it hidden
By a veil from common eyes :
But my own behold it ever,
And its shade upon me lies.

Through the day it stands before me,
And appalls my shrinking sight,
And at night it grows so awful
That I cannot sleep for fright !

For when falls the ghostly moonlight
In the silence of the room,
And my spirit faints within me
As it hearkens for its doom —

'Tis no more the woman's statue,
But the woman's self I see,
Pallid with her love and sorrow,
And the death she died for me.

And, so strange her spell upon me,
As she bends above my bed,
She becomes the wretched living,
I the still more wretched dead!



DEAD LEAVES.

THE day is dead, and in its grave,
The flowers are fast asleep ;
But in this solemn wood alone
My nightly watch I keep :
The night is dark, the dew descends,
But dew and darkness are my friends.

I stir the dead leaves under foot,
And breathe the earthy smell ;
It is the odor of decay,
And yet I like it well :
Give others day, and scented flowers,
Give me dead leaves, and midnight hours !



"POEMS OF THE ORIENT."

WE read your little book of Orient lays,
And half believe old superstitions true ;
No Saxon like ourselves, an Arab, you,
Stolen in your babyhood by Saxon fays.
That you in fervid songs recall the blaze
Of eastern suns ; behold the deep-blue skies ;
Lie under rustling palms ; breathe winds of spice,
And dream of veiled sultanas, is no praise.
All this is native to you as the air ;
You but regain the birthright lost of yore :
The marvel is it now becomes our own.
We wind the turban round our Frankish hair,
Spring on our steeds, that paw the desert's floor,
And take the sandy solitude alone !

THE DEMON OF MUSIC.

THERE'S a demon in Music,
 Whatever its tone ;
He dwells in the crowd
 Of its voices alone :
He moans when they laugh,
 He laughs when they moan !

This demon of Music
 Hath some how been crossed ;
He longs for what is not,
 Or was, and is lost :
That Life is a torture
 He knows to his cost !

O demon of Music !
 I pity your pain ;
I have felt it myself,
 And shall feel it again :
'Tis the riddle of living,
 This living in vain !

THE SEA.

[THE LOVER.]

THOU pallid fisher maiden,
That standest by the shore,
Why dost thou watch the ocean,
And hearken to its roar ?

It is some Danish sailor,
That sails the Spanish main :
Nor will thy roses redden
Till he returns again.

Thou simple fisher maiden !
He cares no more for thee :
He sleeps with the mermaidens,
The witches of the sea.

Thou should'st not watch the ocean,
And hearken to its roar,
When bridal bells are ringing
In little kirks ashore.

Go, dress thee for thy bridal !
A stalwart man like me
Is worth a thousand sailors,
Whose bones are in the sea !



My only dreams are waking dreams,
The fancies of the day ;
At night I lie upon my bed
And rest as soundly as the dead,
Who sleep the years away !

To some the doors of Sleep unclose,
To me the gate of Death :
I enter not the sunless land,
But all night on the threshold stand,
My life upon my breath !



AT REST.

With folded hands the lady lies
In flowing robes of white,
A globéd lamp beside her couch,
A disc of tender light.

With such a light above her head,
A little year ago,
She walked adown the shadowy vale
Where the blood-red roses grow!

A shape or shadow joined her there,
To pluck the royal flower;
But stole the lily from her breast,
Albeit her only dower.

With that all went — her false love first,
And then her peace of heart:
The hard world frowned; her friends grew cold:
She hid in tears apart:

And now she lies upon her couch,
Amid the dying light,
Nor wakes to hear the little voice
That moans throughout the night!



WRECKS of clouds of a sombre gray,
Like the ribbed remains of a mastodon,
Were piled in masses along the west,
And a streak of red stretched over the sun.

I stood on the deck of the ferry boat,
As the summer evening deepened to night ;
Where the tides of the river ran darkling past,
Through lengthening pillars of crinkled light.

The wind blew over the land and the waves
With its salt sea-breath, and a spicy balm,
And it seemed to cool my throbbing brain,
And lend my spirit its gufty calm.

The forest of masts, the dark-hulled ships,
The twinkling lights, and the sea of men —
I read the riddle of each and all,
And I knew their inner meaning then.

For while the beautiful moon arose,
And drifted the boat in her yellow beams,
My soul went down the river of thought,
That flows in the mystic land of dreams !



No ! I will not leave you, Madam,
In the darkness and the rain ;
'Tis for you to be so cruel,
But for me, I pity pain.
Be my silly love forgotten,
I forgive you your disdain.

You have goodly halls and houses,
And your loves of high degree ;
I have nothing but my passion,
You can never think of me ;
In your pride as far above me,
As the moon above the sea.

But, it seems, at last you love me,
If I read your thoughts aright,
For behold ! I fly your presence,
And you follow in my flight,
Till you find me by the lightnings,
In the thunders of the night !

THE SHADOW.

THERE is but one great sorrow,
All over the wide wide world ;
But that in turn must come to all —
The Shadow that moves behind the pall,
A flag that never is furled !

Till he in his marching crosses
The threshold of the door,
Usurps a place in the inner room,
Where he broods in the awful hush and gloom,
Till he goes, and comes no more —

Save this there is no sorrow,
Whatever we think we feel ;
But when Death comes all's over :
'Tis a blow that we never recover,
A wound that never will heal !

NOVEMBER.

THE wild November comes at last
Beneath a veil of rain ;
The night wind blows its folds aside,
Her face is full of pain.

The latest of her race, she takes
The Autumn's vacant throne :
She has but one short moon to live,
And she must live alone.

A barren realm of withered fields :
Bleak woods of fallen leaves :
The palest morns that ever dawned :
The dreariest of eves :

It is no wonder that she comes,
Poor month ! with tears of pain :
For what can one so hopeless do
But weep, and weep again !

THE FIRST SNOW.

To-DAY has been a pleasant day,
Despite the cold and snow ;
A sabbath stillness filled the air,
And pictures slumbered everywhere,
Around, above, below.

We woke at dawn, and saw the trees
Before our windows white ;
Their limbs were clad with snow, like bark,
Save that the under sides were dark,
Like bars against the light.

The fence was white around the house,
The lamp before the door ;
The porch was glazed with pearléd fleet,
Great drifts lay in the silent street,
The street was seen no more !

Long trenches had been roughly dug,
And giant footprints made ;
But few were out ; the streets were bare :
I saw but one pale wanderer there,
And he was like a shade !

I seemed to walk another world,
Where all was still and blest :
The cloudless sky, the stainless snows —
It was a vision of repose,
A dream of heavenly rest :

A dream the holy night completes,
For now the moon hath come,
I stand in heaven with folded wings,
A free and happy soul that sings
When all things else are dumb !



“BURIED IN SONGS THAT NEVER YET WERE
SUNG.”

COULD I arrest the flight of Time,
Revive the years of yore,
I would not ask one sorrow less,
Or know one joy the more :
It were enough to sing the songs
I should have sung before.

My days and years have silent been,
For all that I have sung :
Some dreamy rhymes have dropped from me,
Some sad hath sorrow wrung ;
But nothing great ; and now, alas !
I am no longer young.

I would recall my early dreams,
But they are dead to me ;
As well with last year's withered buds
Reclothe a this year's tree :
It is not what I might have been,
But what I yet may be.

That thought alone avails me now,
And all regrets are vain :
They seem to bring a dreamy bliss,
But bring a certain pain :
To him who works, and only him,
The Past returns again.



II.

CARMEN NATURÆ TRIUMPHALE.

I.

Musing in solitude the summer long,
Musing beside this sea, beneath these skies,
Whose cloudy calm upon my spirit lies,
My spirit has been fed, my fainting heart made strong.
No more content with sensuous sounds and sights,
No more content with sensuous bread and wine,
I feel a hunger and a thirst divine ;
Forgetting all my dreams, and soft delights,
My days of indolence, my sweet voluptuous nights !
My wild voluptuous nights are flown ;
I cannot live by bread alone,
For bread is naught ;
I live by thought,
Giving myself to Nature,
A many-minded creature,
Whom sovereign Nature loves, a sovereign Child of
Nature !

II.

There was a time, a wasted time in youth,
Before my idle soul unfurled her wings,

When I looked round upon all outward things
As truths, and not the outward shows of Truth :
The forms and powers of Nature were my slaves ;
A flower was then a simple flower to me,
A tree a tree,
And the sea nothing, save a waste of waves.
Now, these are nothing of themselves alone ;
A shining mantle over them is thrown :
Or years have raised the mantle of my youth,
Whereby I see the world in all its naked truth.

III.

The outward world of sound and sight,
The shows of day, the pomps of night,
Are other than they seem ;
The clouds around a hidden star,
The sleep around a dream.
The airs that fan the globe
Wrap it with Being, like a robe ;
And the clouds waft it over land and sea,
Like Ages floating through Eternity !
It lives in dust, and grass, and flowers,
And in the trees,
And in the springs, and streams, and seas,
And in the mountains, Earth's Titanic Powers ;
And in Earth's central deeps it dwells the same ;
A heart of fire, it beats in fire and flame !

Throughout the Universe there is no spot
Where Life is not :
Nowhere is any death : Death does but seem ;
A dream within the dream :
Nothing but Life, and Change, its heart and cause,
The adamant base of crumbling laws.
The flowers may fade away, the woods may fall,
The sea may waste the land, the land the sea,
And men may feed the worms beneath the pall,
And Time may vanish in Eternity ;
Still, ocean-like, the tides of Being lie,
Filled from exhaustless urns ;
The flame of Life still burns,
And God still sits on high,
And watches Earth below, with His unsleeping eye !

IV.

Why should I read what man has penned,
His speculations without end,
When here the Book of Nature lies,
Open to all her children's eyes,
No wire-drawn, narrow comments there,
Nor any warrant for despair ?
I tell you, Nay ! It cannot be,
Creation is enough for me :
I will not look
On creed or book,

Or aught beside the earth and skies ;
 There is no need
 Of book, or creed,
To teach a man, and make him good and wise ;
 We all are wise and good,
 If truly understood ;
Within ourselves the source of truth and virtue lies.
 There is no need of temples built with hands,
 To cast their shadows over subject lands ;
 No need of stoled priests, and chanting friars,
 Censers, and incense smoke, and altar fires ;
 No need of crucifix and beads ;
 No need of sacred bread and wine,
 Of hymns, and psalms, and prayers supine,
And penances and fasts, whereby our nature bleeds.
 We should obey ourselves alone,
 Nor ask what paths have others trod ;
 God wants no sign to know His own,
 Nor they to know their God.
Better, far better now
The dew upon my brow,
Than all the ancient use and wont
Of water from the holy font,
Though shed by holiest hands on earth,
The symbol of a heavenly birth.
The bread and wine of quiet thought
 Is sacrament enough for me ;

Enough the Temple of the world,
The sky, the land, the sea :
Whether the Spring perform its dewy rite ;
Whether the Summer binds her brow with
leaves ;
Whether the Autumn stands amid the sheaves ;
Or whether Winter plucks his locks of white.
God speaks to me in shouting winds,
And in the waves that shoreward come,
And in the little insect's hum,
And in the still small voice of human minds.
The year, with all its train of nights and days,
Is a perpetual service in His praise ;
Morn comes from Him, as came the olden seers,
With fiery messages of awe and love ;
From Him the golden Noon that climbs above,
Transfigured day by day from immemorial years !
And Night, incarnate Night,
Forever veiled and calm,
Eldest of all things that created be ;
Night reads in silence her eternal psalm,
The gospel of the darkness, penned in light,
The starred evangel of infinity !
The road to Heaven is broader than the world,
And deeper than the kingdoms of the dead ;
And up its ample paths the nations tread,
With all their banners furled :

No saint nor angel sits beside its gate,
Holding the key within his griping hands :
The loving gate of Heaven wide open stands,
Not to be closed again by earthly hate :
And evermore, with all their grief and sin,
The souls keep pouring in,
Singing melodious psalms,
While angels pitch their tents beneath the heavenly
palms !

v.

There be who love not Nature, souls forlorn,
Who see no beauty in the smiling morn,
No joy in noon, no tenderness in night,
No pillared cloud of light !
Not such the little child, nor such the youth
Who has not done his childly nature wrong :
These Nature loves, and leads through realms of
truth,
Forever flushed with atmospheres of Song !
Can I forget the wonder, and the joy,
That Nature roused within me, when a boy ?
The gush of feelings, pure and undefiled,
The deep and rapturous gladness,
The nameless sadness,
The Vision that overpowered the visionary child ?
Forget ! forget ! the very hour I do,
May Heaven forget me, too !

May Nature shut me in her wastes apart,
And press me — never more on her maternal heart !

VI.

O Nature ! Nature ! I have worshipped thee
From being's dimmest dawn, perchance before ;
Or ere my spirit touched this earthly shore,
Or time began with me.
When but a babe, (so say the ancient crones
Who nursed me then,) I watched the sky for
hours,
Smiled at the clouds, and laughed in glee at
showers,
And wept when winds were at their wintry moans.
A little truant child with trembling tread,
I sought the garden walks, with wondering mind,
Perplexed to hear the fluting of the wind
In branches overhead :
I loved the wind, I loved the whispering trees,
I loved their shadowy shifting images,
And loved the spots of light that lay like smiles
Around the green arcades, and leafy forest aisles.
With bolder steps I tracked the meadows, deep
In fragrant grasses, decked with daisies white,
And marked the mist on many a mountain height,
Melting away like Sleep.
The larks went up before me, and behind,

Ragged and black in tempests, veined with lightning ;

And when the moon was brightening
Impearled, and purpled by the changeful moon.

I loved the Moon :

Whether she lingered by the porch of Even,
When Day retiring struck his yellow tents ;
Whether she scaled the ancient peaks of heaven,
Whose angels watched her from its battlements ;
Whether, like early Spring, she walked the night,
O'er tracts of cloudy snow ;
Whether she dwindled in the morning light,
Like some departed spirit, loath to go ;
Or sifted showers of silver through the trees,
Or trod with her white feet across the heaving seas !

I loved the Sea :

Whether in calm it glassed the gracious day
With all its light, the night with all its fires ;
Whether in storm it lashed its sullen spray,
Wild as the heart when passionate youth expires ;
Or lay, as now, a torture to my mind,
In yonder land-locked bay, unwrinkled by the wind !

I loved the Wind :

Whether it kissed my hair, and pallid brow ;
Whether with sweets my sense it fed, as now ;
Whether it blew across the scudding main ;
Whether it shrieked above a stretch of plain ;

Whether, on autumn days, in solemn woods,
And barren solitudes,
Along the waste it whirled the withered leaves ;
Whether it hummed around my cottage eaves,
And shook the rattling doors,
And died with long-drawn sighs, on bleak and dreary
moors !

Whether in winter, when its trump did blow
Through desolate gorges dirges of despair,
It drove the snowflakes slantly down the air,
And piled the drifts of snow ;
Or whether it breathed soft, in vernal hours,
And filled the trees with sap, and filled the grass with
flowers.

Wind, sea, and moon, and clouds, and day and
night,

The weeks, and months, and seasons of the
year :

What was there was not dear ?

What was not radiant with heavenly light ?

What did not Nature cherish that was mine ?

What did not I adore, O Nature, that was thine ?

VII.

My life with Nature now is blent ;

She is a portion of my blood ;

I am her passive instrument,

The creature of her every mood ;
A part and parcel of her forms,
Of her calms, and of her storms.
To her my soul unfolds as violets do,
When April winds are low, and April skies are blue.
I am a harp whereon she plays,
When she accompanies her lays ;
A sea of moon-like presence sways,
Shifting its tides a thousand ways.
Deep in her heart I live, and feel
Whate'er she pleases to reveal ;
And in my heart, with joy intense,
I paint her forms that fade not thence,
And in my thoughts see more and more magnificence ;
My waking thoughts, and in my sleep
I carry on the marvel deep,
And dream all night of tropic seas and skies,
And Time immortal Youth, and Earth a Paradise !
Nor does the beautiful and bright
Alone affect me with delight ;
Familiar things, and common-place,
Give me emotions undefined ;
As if I gazed in some seraphic face,
Some presence filled with mind.
A Presence fronts and haunts me everywhere,
Stands in the sun, and dips below the sea ;
Fills all the voidest spaces of the air,

And lives in all things, like Eternity !

The motes of dust on which I tread,

The floating stars above my head,

All without me, and within,

To Nature and to Man are kin.

Whence comes this strange affinity

That Man, O Nature, has for thee ?

Forever unto thee we run,

And give ourselves away ;

Like melting mists that seek the sun,

Like night that seeks the day.

To Nature do we turn, and minister,

Because we were of old a part of her.

It is a recognition,

A memory, an appealing ;

An interchange of vision,

An interchange of feeling ;

A twofold love, within the linked scope

Of backward-looking Memory, and forward-looking

Hope !

The soul of man detects, and sympathizes

With its old shapes of matter, long outworn ;

And matter, too, to new sensations born,

Detects the soul of man, with spiritual surprises.

Few understand their mutual dreams,

And few translate their speeches ;

Save poets versed in Nature's themes,

And those whom Nature teaches.
They stare at us, and we at them ;
We dare not flight, nor dare contemn :
We are the ripe fruit on the stem.
Not a leaf upon the tree,
Not a bird upon the bough,
But waves its little flag to me,
And sings within my spirit now ;
Sings to itself in bowers apart,
Within the regions of my heart.
I am what winds and waters make me ;
What the clouds and thunders please ;
And what the changeful seas :
As Nature is, so men must take me ;
For I to Nature's self belong,
As much as any bud or bee ;
And when you do to her a wrong,
You do a wrong to me.
Be it sad, or merry, or sweet, or strong,
She breathes her influence in my song,
And in my daily life she gleams,
And is the substance of my dreams.
I love her not as bard or painter might,
To spy and seize on sound and sight,
But for mine own delight.
Often I do not hear, nor see,
Nor know the banquet laid for me ;

The sun may burn, the stars may shine,
The pallid moon in heaven may pine,
The sea may wash a rocky shore,
The wind may howl, the tempest roar,
Nor I be other than before.

It may be day, it may be night,
Or foul or fair,
I do not care,

I go not there to learn, but for mine own delight !

And yet I learn what books can never teach,
Nor any words express ;

A mystic love, a wordless speech ;

For Nature teaches so, in sacred silentness.

And when we seem asleep in dreams,

Our deepest lore is caught,

For Truth within man's nature dwells,

Her fabled fount, her well of wells,

Her crystal deep of thought !

VIII.

In silent thought, that yearns to find a tongue,
Burthened with cares, and racked with cureless
pains,

I rove to-day through Nature's wide domains,
No longer gay and young ;

No longer moved with feelings undefiled,
No more, no more a child !

But wherefore grieve? The Past is past,
Nor can the Present always last;
It sows the Future in its seeds.
And flowers will grow, where grow the weeds;
And suns will shine, and dews will fall;
And Love, the sum of human needs,
Love, comes to all:
Yea! even comes, so universal he,
To me, to even me!
Then let me dry again these gathering tears,
These bitter tears, and turn, Beloved, to thee;
For thee to live and die, in future years,
As thou for only me!
Meanwhile my soul to meditation given,
A many-sided mirror, broad and bright,
Reflects whatever meets my thoughtful sight,
The myriad shapes and hues of earth and heaven;
Diffused through all, like odors in the wind,
My mind the Universe, the Universe my Mind!
1851.

INVOCATION TO SLEEP.

DRAW the curtains round your bed,
And I'll shade the wakeful light;
'Twill be hard for you to sleep,
If you keep me still in sight;
But you must though, and without me,
For I have a song to write;
Then sleep, love, sleep:
The flowers have gone to rest,
And the birds are in the nest:
It is time for you to join them beneath the wings of
Sleep!

Wave thy poppies round her, Sleep!
Touch her eyelids, flood her brain:
Banish Memory, Thought, and Strife,
Bar the portals of her life,
Till the morning comes again.
Let no enemy intrude
On her helpless solitude:
Fear, and Pain, and all their train —

Keep the evil hounds at bay,
And all evil dreams away.
"Thou, thyself, keep thou the key,
Or entrust it unto me,
 Sleep ! Sleep ! Sleep !
 A lover's eyes are bright,
 In the darkest night,
And jealous even of dreams, almost of thee, dear
 Sleep !

I must sit, and think, and think,
Till the stars begin to wink :
(For the web of Song is wrought
Only in the loom of Thought :)
She must lie, and sleep, and sleep,
(Be her slumbers calm and deep !)
Till the dews of morning weep :
Therefore bind your sweetest sprite
To her service and delight,
 All the night,
 Sleep ! Sleep ! Sleep !
And I'll whisper in her ear,
 Like a bee among the flowers,
What she loveth so to hear,
 In the night's impassioned hours,
News from my warm heart to hers,
Burthening Love's ambassadors,

A happy sigh and smile ;
Crooning to myself the while
Ditties delicate and free,
Dedicate to her, and thee,
Sleep ! Sleep ! Sleep !
For I owe ye both a boon,
And I meant to grant it soon,
In my golden numbers that breathe of Love and
Sleep !



THE STORK AND THE RUBY.

A CERTAIN prince—I have forgot his name—
Playing one morning at the archer's game,
Within a garden where his palace stood,
Shot at a stork, and spilled the creature's blood
For very wantonness and cruelty.
Thrice had he pierced his target in the eye
At fifty paces; twice deflowered a rose,
Striking each time the very leaf he chose;
Then he set up his dagger in a hedge,
And split an arrow on its glittering edge.
What next to hit he knew not. Looking round
He saw a stork just lighted on the ground,
To rest itself after its leagues of flight:
The dewy walk in which it stood was bright,
So white its plumage, and so clear its eyes,
Twinkling with innocence, and sweet surprise.
“I'll shoot the silly bird,” the prince exclaimed:
And bending his strong bow he straightway aimed
His keenest arrow at its panting heart;
The lucky arrow missed a vital part

(Or was it some kind wind that pushed it by?)
And only struck and broke the creature's thigh.
The poor thing tumbled in a lily bed,
And its blood ran, and made the lilies red.
It marked the changing color of the flowers,
The winding garden walks, the bloomy bowers,
And last the cruel prince, who laughed with glee —
Fixing the picture in its memory :
This done it struggled up, and flew away,
Leaving the prince amazed, and in dismay.

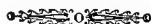
Beyond the city walls, a league or more,
A little maid was spinning at her door,
Singing old songs to cheer the long day's work :
Her name was Heraclis. The fainting stork
Dropped at her feet, and with its ebon bill
Showed her its thigh, broken, and bleeding still :
She fetched it water from a neighbor spring,
And, while it drank and washed each dabbled wing,
She set the fractured bones with pious care,
And bound them with the fillet of her hair.
Eased of its pain again it flew away,
Leaving the maiden happier all the day.

That night the prince, as usual, went to bed,
His royal wine a little in his head :
Beside him stood a casket full of gems,

The spoil of conquered monarchs' diadems :
Great pearls, milk-white, and shining like the moon ;
Emeralds, grass-green ; sapphires, like skies of June ;
Brilliants that threw their light upon the wall ;
And one great ruby that outshone them all,
Large as a pigeon's egg, and red as wine
When held before the sun — a gem divine !
Through these he ran his fingers carelessly,
Like one who dips a handful of the sea,
To sun his eyes with dripping stars of brine ;
At last he slumbered in the pale moonshine.
Meantime the watchful stork was in his bowers ;
Again it saw its blood upon the flowers,
And saw the walks, the fountain's shaft in air,
But not the cruel prince ; no prince was there :
So up and down the spacious courts it flew,
And ever nearer to the palace drew.
Passing the lighted windows, row by row,
It saw the prince, and saw the ruby's glow :
Hopping into his chamber, grave and still,
It seized the precious ruby with its bill,
And spreading then its rapid wings in flight,
Flew out, and vanished in the yawning night.
Night slowly passed, and morning broke again :
There came a light tap on the window-pane
Of Heraclis : it woke her ; she arose,
And, slipping on in haste her peasant clothes,

Opened the door to see who knocked, and lo !
In walked the fłork again, as white as snow,
Triumphant with the ruby, whose red ray
Flamed in her face, anticipating day !
Again the creature pointed to its thigh,
And something human brightened in its eye,
A look that said, “ *I thank you !* ” plain as words :
The virgin’s look was brighter than the bird’s,
So glad was she to see it was not dead :
She fłretched her hand to fleek its bowing head,
But ere she could, it made a sudden fłand,
And thrust the priceless ruby in her hand,
And sailing swiftly through the cottage door
Mounted the morning fky, and came no more !





[ANTIQUE.]

WE are bent with age and cares,
In the last of our gray hairs,
And we lean upon our staffs,
Looking for the epitaphs ;
For we are the last, the last,
In the ruins of the Past.

When our youth was in its prime,
Then it was a merry time ;
Suns were golden, stars were bright,
And the moon was a delight :
And we wandered in its beams
In the sweetest, sweetest dreams !
Now our dreams are fled,
For the happy Past is dead ;
And we feel it lived in vain,
And will never come again.
No ! 'tis gone ! and gone each trace
Of its once-familiar face :

Even the dust for which we yearn
Is lost, and lost its very urn !
Nothing remains except the tomb,
[Earth, and heaven, so draped with clouds !]
And we who wander in its gloom,
And soon will need our shrouds,
So pale are we, and so aghast
At the absence of the Past.

We had friends when we were young,
And we shared their smiles and tears ;
But they are forever flown :
We can only weep alone,
For the unreturning years.
Roses come again with Spring :
[We are standing on the tomb,
But beneath our feet they bloom !]
And the summer birds do sing :
But the dead who loved them so,
They are in the winter's snow,
Far from birds, and far from flowers,
And this weary life of ours.
All is over ! Naught remains,
Save the memory of our pains,
And the years that bear us fast
To the silence of the Past !

PAIN IN AUTUMN.

A DROWSY pain, a dull, dead pain
Preys on my heart, and clouds my brain;
And shadows brood above my dreams,
Like spectral mists o'er haunted streams.

There is no fire within the grate;
The room is cold and desolate,
And dampness on the window-panes
Foretells the equinoctial rains.
The stony road runs past the door,
Dry and dusty evermore;
Up and down the people go,
Shadowy figures, sad and slow:
And the strange houses lie below.

Across the road the dark elms wait,
Ranged in a row before the gate,
Giving their voices to the wind,
And their sorrows to my mind.

Behind the house, the river flows,
Half unrest and half repose ;
Ships lie below with mildewed sails,
Tattered in forgotten gales ;
Along each hulk a whitish line,
The dashing of the ancient brine :
Beyond, the spaces of the sea,
Which old Ocean's portals be :
The land runs out its horns of sand,
And the sea comes in to meet the land.

Sky sinks to sea, sea swells to sky,
Till they meet, and mock the eye ;
And where they meet the sand hills lie ;
No cattle in their pastures seen,
For the yellow grass was never green :
With a calm and solemn stare
They look to heaven, in blank despair ;
And heaven, with pity dumb the while,
Looks down again with a sickly smile.

The sky is gray, half dark, half bright,
Swimming in dim, uncertain light,
Something between the day and night.
And the winds blow, but soft and low,
Unheard, unheeded in their wo ;
Like some sick heart, too near o'erthrown

To vent its grief, by sigh or moan,
Some heart that breaks, like mine, alone !

And here I dwell, condemned to see,
And be, what all these phantoms be,
Within this realm of penal pain,
Beside the melancholy main ;
The waste which lies, as legend saith,
Between the worlds of Life and Death ;
A soul from Life to Death betrayed,
A Shadow in the World of Shade !



THE ABDICATION OF NOMAN, THE ELDER.

*“Is it an echo of something
Read with a boy’s delight,
Viziers nodding together
In some Arabian night?”*

TENNYSON.

NOMAN, the King of Hira, sat one day
In his pavilion, pitched at Karwanak,
With Bahram Gour, the son of Yezdejird,
And Adi Ibn Zeid, the Persian bard :
Cross-legged on scarlet cushions stuffed with down
They sat and smoked ; the bubbling of their pipes
Was like a river in the land of sleep.
The curtain of the tent was drawn aside,
Looped up with golden cords ; a twinkling gleam
Glanced from the tassels, smote the water-bowls,
And perished in the great sea-emerald
On Noman’s turban : other light was none ;
They lolled the hours away in purple dusk.

Before the doorway of the tent they saw

The palace park and garden, bright with spring.
A pillared avenue of stately palms
Slept in the sun : a fountain rose and fell,
Breaking the silver surface at its base ;
Gold-fish, like sunken ingots, lay in heaps
Beneath the fountain's rain ; beside its rim,
Dipping his long bill in a lotus cup,
A black crane stooped : between the silent palms
A length of silken carpet was unrolled ;
A white gazelle dangled a silver chain,
Picking its way through tufts of brodered flowers.
Flowers of all hues and odors streaked the ground ;
Roses, fire-red ; large tulips, cups of flame ;
Banks of snow lilies, turning dew to pearls ;
And rolling rivers of anemonies,
The flowers that Noman loved ; their crimson leaves
Were rubies set on stalks of emerald.
Broad meadows stretched afar, wherein, dim-seen
Through winking haze, the still Euphrates lay,
The great Euphrates fresh from Babylon.

Between their whiffs of smoke with happy eyes
They drank the landscape in : to Bahram Gour
It grew his father's garden at Madain,
Save that the Emir's daughter was not there,
Whereat he sighed : his long beard Adi stroked,
And thrummed his idle fingers in the air,

Turning a couplet in his tuneful brain :
Noman alone was sad, for he nor had
The poet's idleness, nor prince's youth :
Grown gray in troubled rule he longed for rest,
But found it never ; fair things made him grieve,
Because their lives are short. He saw the end.

“Why grasp at wealth and power? Why hoard
up gold,
Or make our whims a law for other men?
Earth hides her gold in veined rocks and hills,
Packs it in river sands : we dig it out,
And stamp our kingly faces in its light,
And call it ours : does Earth give up her claim?
Not she ; she calmly waits, and takes it back.
We sift the sands, dive down into the waves,
Ransack the caves for gems ; Earth gives them up :
I have an hundred caskets full of pearls ;
Ten chests of chrysolites ; a turquoise plate
That holds a maund of corn ; a chandelier,
The chains whereof are beryls, linked with gold,
Its flame a ruby, found in Balafhan :
Not mine, but Earth's ; for I shall pass away,
I, and my race, but Earth will still remain,
And keep my gems ; in palaces like mine,
To swell the treasury of future kings,
Or haply in the caverns where they grew.

“We build rich palaces, and wall them in,
Make parks and gardens near, plant trees, sow
 flowers,
And say — ‘*All this is ours !*’ but what says Earth ?
She only smiles her still cold smile of scorn :
Forests a thousand parasangs in length
Are hers, and hers the tropic’s zone of bloom ;
And, when we die, our marble palaces :
She lets the jackal prowl about their courts !

“My days have numbered five and sixty years ;
Twenty and eight were passed upon the throne :
I count them lost. I may have gained some power ;
Added a few wild tribes to those I rule,
And treasures to my treasure, but my life —
(I had so little time to think of that !)
Is not a whit the richer, save in cares.
Ah ! who that knows himself would be a king ?”

So spake the King the secret of his heart,
Like one who babbles to himself alone ;
His head dropped on his bosom, and his beard
Hung in his lap : the shadow of his words
Drifted across the stream of Adi’s thought,
And, when the King had ended, he began :

“Name me the King whose power was vast
 enough

To cope with death, or cheat the sepulchre.
 Whither is Chosroes gone, the mightiest, he,
 Of Persian Kings? Whither did Sapor go?
 And they, the fair-haired race, the Roman lords —
 Tell me why no memorial lives of them.
 And he, the nameless King, who Hadr built,
 Where Khabur and the lordly Tigris flow;
 He faced his palace walks with marble slabs,
 Polished and white, and raised his roof so high,
 His ridgy roofs, the birds made nests thereon:
 The thought of dying never crossed his mind;
 But not the less he died, and died alone;
 For when Death came to that unhappy King
 The very sentinels had fled his gates.”

“The end of all things must be near at hand,”
 Said Bahram Gour, half earnest, half in jest,
 “For lo! the world hath now two Solomons,
 Whose wisdom is compressed in three small words,
 The knell of Folly — ‘*All is Vanity!*’
 It may be so, my dear philosophers,
 But are you free from blame? What says the song?
 ‘*It is my sight that fails me, not the rose
 That waxes pale; my scent that is too coarse,
 No lack of odour in the heavenly musk.*’
 Cry down the world who will, but Bahram Gour
 Will love it still.” “And I,” the poet said,

His fancied sadness dying with the words
That gave it birth, "and never more than now,
When to the quiet tent and drowsy pipe
Succeeds the eager life on flying steeds."

From out their marble stalls the dusky grooms
Led forth the royal stud of milk-white mares ;
The falconers came next with hooded birds,
Each with a silver label on its leg ;
And then the keepers with the beasts of chase
In chains ; lithe panthers, and keen-scented dogs,
Tigers, whose tawny hides are mapped with black,
And lions with no manes : the white gazelle
Fled from their cruel eyes to Noman's tent.
Slowly, like one who wills away a dream,
Lifting his head the King called home his thoughts.
He saw the trembling creature at his feet,
And fondled it ; the voice of Adi's lute
Wooing a song brought Adi to his mind,
The jingling of a scabbard Bahram Gour ;
Adi still sat and smoked, but Bahram Gour
Had risen, and was girding on his sword.
"My sombre fancies led me from the chase ;
But now that I have found myself once more
Let us at once depart : they wait for us."
He beckoned, and the grooms led up their steeds.

Between the palms, whose shadows struck their
brows,
Launching across the carpet's bed of flowers,
Around the fountain's glittering mist they rode :
The fretful panthers snuffed, and tugged their chains ;
The calmer lions, quiet in their strength,
Strode on, and dragged their keepers after them.

Not far from Hira, by the river's side,
Where stood a ruined city, was a tomb ;
Between the river and the tomb were trees
Whose twinkling leaves were shaken by the wind.
Dropping the hunt before the game was roused
Thither the King and poet rode alone ;
They saw the shaken boughs, but felt no wind.
“ The leaves are tongues,” said Noman, “ and they
speak,

With some grave message charged, or prophecy :
You read the hidden meaning of the flowers,
Can you expound the language of the trees ? ”

“ Many have here dismounted from their steeds,
And kneeling camels, in the days of old ;
Have flaked their thirst with wine beneath our shade,
And led their camels to the limpid tide :
They strained their shining wine from precious flasks,
They tossed the splendid trappings of their steeds ;

Gaily they lived, the pensioners of Time ;
But ere life's noon they died, cut off by Fate.
Their ashes drift and waste like withered leaves,
Blown by the east wind now, now by the west."
So spake the trees to Adi ; so he spake.

"All things are in a league with my grave thoughts
To make me think of death," replied the King :
"If leaves whose little lives of sun and dew
Last not the year out say that man is dust,
What must the dust, where men by millions sleep,
The dead of ages, say ? " The poet stooped,
And scooped his two hands full of dry white dust,
And held it to his ear. " Interpret it."
" Know that the dust was once a man like thee ;
Know too that thou wilt one day be but dust."
So spake the dust to Adi : so he spake.

"The words are changed," said Noman, "not the
tune,
For that still urges man's mortality :
When man forgets his end, nor earth nor heaven
Can hold their peace. The tomb remains to speak ;
I go to question that : wait for me here.
Fear not to see me enter its dark walls ;
The time will come when they will shut me in
Forever : now I shall return again."

He waved the poet back, and throwing wide
Its mouldering doors went down into the tomb.

Before the place, a watchful sentinel,
The poet paced his beat, with noiseless steps,
Harkening the while to catch the King's least call :
He heard the talking leaves above his head,
The river rippling on the sandy shore,
But not the King : the grass was growing thick
Around the tomb, but where the mares were hitched
It grew not : cutting with his sword a swath,
He bore an armful to the hungry mares :
But still the King nor called to him, nor came.
At last the fiery arrows of the noon
Drove back the lessening shadows of the trees,
And hemmed them in a circle round their trunks ;
To this the bard retreated from the heat.
The happy light came down upon his heart,
And, stretched at ease, he sang a summer song :

“ The morning moon is set, the stars are gone ;
Beside the palace gate the peacocks strut,
And in the tank the early lotus wakes.

“ The dew fell all night long, and drenched my robe ;
The nightingale complained to me, in vain :
I waited for the dawn to meet my love.

“ She stands before me in the garden walk,
Her blue robe bordered by a fringe of pearls ;
She offers me a rose : I kneel to her.

“ ‘ Nay! speak not yet, though all your words are
pearls !

Your smiles outrun your speech, and greet me first ;
But when you smile not, speak, or I shall die !

“ ‘ I kiss the rose : I would it were your lips !
But wherefore ? such a kiss would end my days.
Pity me, sweet ; my heart is at your feet ! ’

“ My long black hair is streaked with silver threads,
Years dim my eyes ; yet still, in thought, I see
The Rose of Beauty in the garden walk.

“ She sleeps the long, long sleep : disturb her not
O nightingales ! be silent, or depart ;
And thou my heart be still, or moan, and break.”

The river rippled louder, but the leaves
Crowding together whispered, and the clash
Shook one at Adi's feet ; the dust was stirred :
He raised his eyes, and lo ! a cloud of dust
Blown from the clattering hoofs of flying steeds :
He knew the milk-white mares, and knew the troop

That rode them — Noman's huntsmen; Bahram
Gour

Trailing his spear rode wildly at their head.

"The King is lost," he shouted as he came :

"Not so," said Adi, pointing to the tomb,

"The King is there: he muses in the tomb;

Perchance he sleeps: I would have shared his dreams,
But he forbade, and made me wait him here."

Then Bahram Gour went down into the tomb,

To wake the King, and many of the lords

Went with him; those who stayed behind were
hushed.

They heard the talking leaves above their heads,

The river rippling on the sandy shore,

But not the King; at length a voice was heard —

"*The King is dead,*" and Bahram Gour came out
Bearing a lifeless body in his arms.



THE MOON ON THE SPIRE.

THE white clouds lie in drifts to-night
Around the moon, whose silver fire
Kindles the old Cathedral spire,
And makes the cross a living light.

It gleams and twinkles through my blinds,
It shines on those who walk the street,
It opens heaven to those who meet
At vespers with believing minds.

“How marvellous the Cross,” they say,
“That crowns the stately Christian pile !
It lends the moon a saintly smile,
It saves the world from day to day.”

Ye speak your thoughts, but I who sit
Above the crowd, and watch the moon —
I hear from her cold lips a tune
To other words : and this is it :

“ My crescent glitters in the air,
Above the mosque of Moslem lands :
High in his tower the muezzin stands,
And calls the faithful there to prayer.

“ By Indian streams, and swamps of rice,
Pagodas rise, and idols frown :
I pour my heathen brightness down,
And make the night a Paradise.

“ Pagoda, mosque, and Christian dome,
I see them all ; in all the flame
Of worship burns : God sees the same :
God has in each and all his home.”



THE GRAVE OF ROBIN HOOD.

BESIDE this oak, below this mound,
In this unconsecrated ground,
This dim, remote, neglected wood,
He sleeps, they tell me — Robin Hood.
This is his grave ; they laid him here,
That left not in the world his peer :
Here doth his body go to dust ;
His soul hath gone to God, I trust.

He was a knight in days of yore,
A lord, or earl, or may be more,
Who forfeited his right divine,
When Richard fought in Palestine.
But we who come from o'er the sea
Care nothing for his pedigree ;
That sham with us is out of date,
A bugbear of the feudal state ;
Nor will it ever win again
The fear or love of freeborn men.
It is enough for us that he

Himself was noble, brave, and free :
We leave the rest to fools and knaves,
Who build upon their fathers' graves.
So, whether lord, or whether earl,
Or but a base and common churl,
He was a noble man and good,
The King of Outlaws, Robin Hood.
He stayed to hear his banishment,
And then to Sherwood Forest went,
Followed by fourscore archers keen,
In liveries of Lincoln green,
All famous marksmen, stout and tall ;
And he was chief among them all,
For he could peel a willow wand,
And fight the best man in the land.
And there they dwelt for many a year,
And lived upon the royal deer.

Methinks I see them, blithe and gay,
Feasting upon a summer's day ;
The tables groan with hearty cheer
Of beef, to Englishmen so dear,
Juicy, and rare ; and venison steaks ;
Cold warden pies, and sugared cakes,
And pasties filled with lark and quail,
Flanked round with cans of foaming ale.
And in the shadow of a tree,

Whose boughs do make a canopy,
Upon his dais sits Robin Hood,
The merry monarch of the wood,
With sweet Maid Marian at his side,
By virtue of her grace and pride
The mistress there, so debonair,
With knots of wild flowers in her hair.
She twines his cup; nor only she,
But near a many damsels be,
Sipping the cups of clouted cream,
While lifted goblets clash and gleam.
And close beside the wine-butt stands
Friar John: his beads are in his hands,
But put not to their goodly use:
His cowl is off, his girdle loose;
To twist it tight he vainly tries:
He rolls to heaven his amorous eyes,
And chants a mass, which breaks ere long
Into a jolly drinking-song!

So passed the days of feast and fun,
The careless children of the sun;
But sober hours succeeded soon,
And music of a sweeter tune.
The maidens sat in summer bowers,
And sang old songs, and gathered flowers,
Or hunted round for hollow trees,

To rob the hives of wandering bees.
Their shafts and bows the archers made,
And shot at targets in the shade ;
Wrestled and fought with right good will,
And practised games of strength and skill ;
While Robin Hood, bold Robin Hood,
In solemn fancies walked the wood,
Till all the freedom of the place
Did fill his heart, and light his face !

Had he been questioned, frank and fair,
About his right and title there,
He would have answered with a smile,
In something like the following style :
“ My right and title ? Sir, do you
The vexéd subject still renew
Of what is mine and what is thine,
When both are mortal, and divine ?
'Od's blood ! we all are men, I guess,
And none are more, and none are less,
By birth and right ; if you or I
Say we are more, we do but lie !
The world is ours, despite the few
Who lay and hold a claim thereto.
If 'tis our privilege and right
To breathe the air, and see the light,
'Tis ours to dwell where'er we please,

In cities, towns, or under trees,
Provided none are dispossessed,
For sure we would not rob the rest :
Now none, good Sir, are ousted here,
And none are hurt — save good fat deer ;
If any should complain 'tis they,
As, without doubt, some will to-day :
For, under favor, Sir, 'tis meet
That men, tall men like us should eat.
As for the King, why, it may be
That venison is his property ;
But let him show his rightful claim,
The Bill of Sale in Nature's name,
The lease divine, he holds in fee,
Forever dispossessing me,
Condemned to bread, which I, poor man,
Must get — the best way that I can !
And let him prove his claim by law,
In sterling English without flaw,
And I will yield his ground to-day,
And heavy damages will pay ;
But till he does, I have a right
As good as his — the rule of Might.
So forward ! hunt the kingly deer,
And hey, for feasting, dance and cheer !
I'll talk to you some other day,
And so, your servant. Boys, away ! ”

So would, methinks, brave Robin Hood
Have proved his right and title good,
To curious questioners, and they
Persisting still, another way
He would have ta'en to make it plain,
And drawn an arrow to the head ;
A most convincing thing, 'tis said.
But few had stayed to hear, I ween,
An argument so sure and keen.
And faith, I think the knave was right :
But right or not, he had the Might,
And he maintained it till he died,
By Might opposed on every side,
A merry outlaw, bold and free,
The very Lord of Liberty !

And is this all the outlaw did ?
And is there nothing evil hid ?
There surely must be something more,
Some cloud that should have come before.
There is some little talk, indeed,
Of how he made the keepers bleed ;
Some end to some old sheriff's hope,
Before he could adjust the rope :
Some talk of priests, and bishops old
He eased of certain sums of gold ;
Some fight, perchance, against the King,

Some victory, or some such thing :
But nought of blood unjustly shed,
Nor tax on malt, nor tax on bread,
Nor pious frauds of holy sees,
Whose bishops roll in golden ease,
Nor shooting starving men that dare
Molest his lordship's deer or hare :
Nothing that one to-day may do,
And still be lawful, good, and true,
Or hosts would wear a branded brow
In lawful, merry England now.
Then let us, if you please, be free
From cant and prim hypocrisy,
Nor lift our hands in perfect prayer,
For flesh is sinful everywhere ;
And few, that dare, had 'scaped his crimes,
Had they been living in his times,
Banished like him, and hunted down
By all the minions of a crown.
So let him rest, nor dare to breathe
Calumnious airs to blight his wreath ;
But rather pile your marbles round,
And make this forest holy ground,
That men may come from far and near,
To reverence him who slumbers here ;
For none for man's best rights have stood,
More manfully than Robin Hood,
The brave old freeman, Robin Hood !

THE CHILDREN'S PRAYER.

If there is any thing that will endure
The eye of God, because it still is pure,
It is the spirit of a little child,
Fresh from his hand, and therefore undefiled.
Nearer the gate of Paradise than we,
Our children breathe its airs, its angels see;
And when they pray, God hears their simple prayer,
Yea, even sheathes his sword, in judgment bare :
Witness this legend of a by-gone time,
Itself a song, though yet untold in rhyme.

Where stretches Egypt, and its gardens smile,
Won from the desert by the lordly Nile,
Famine and Pestilence went hand in hand
Of old, and ravaged that unhappy land ;
For lo ! the Nile, wherein its plenty lies,
The fertilizing Nile forgot to rise :
Day after day it lay, a sluggish flood,
And slimy monsters wallowed in its mud.
When spread the news, and ill news fly apace,
A fearful panic seized the Moslem race ;

For not alone its native tribes it fed,
But all the East to Egypt looked for bread.
In Cairo first, there most improvident,
Then in the towns, and in the wandering tent,
Under the palms, by many a shrunken well,
Fainting they fell, and perished where they fell.

At first they merely starved; but by and by
A dread infection brooded in the sky;
There was no time to starve, with every breath
They drew in death, a tainted, loathsome death.
All business ceased; bazaars and mosques were
closed:

Somewhere about his tower the muezzin dozed;
Was heard no more his cry, (it was too late!)
“*There is no God but God! Lo! God is Great!*”
No more the faithful bowed towards the East:
Was kept no more the Bairam’s sacred feast:
(The fasts, alas! they could not help but keep!)
The land was shrouded in a deathly sleep.
You might have walked through Cairo, street by
street,

Nor met a soul; ’twere better not to meet:
The flying thief, the murderer abhorred,
Or plague-struck beggars — such were those abroad.

At length a sheik remembered what was writ,
(Through faith, not doubt, had he forgotten it:)
That — “*Children are the keys of Paradise.*”

Also that — “ *They alone are good and wise,
Because their thoughts, their very lives are prayer.* ”

He sought the mosque, summoned the people there,
Told them his thought, and made its meaning plain,
That they by childish lips should pray again.

’Twas said, and done : the Emir gave command,
And straight the muezzins sang it through the land.

The hour was fixed at dawn ; at last dawn came :
Slowly the sun arose, a globe of flame
Struggling with blood-red clouds : in every street
Was seen a crowd, was heard the tramp of feet :
Around the mosques they gathered with a sigh,
Waiting to know if they should live or die !
The Imauns crowned the babes with early flowers,
And bore them up the minarets and towers,
Even to their topmost summits, where they stood,
And saw the Pyramids and Nile’s black flood,
And Cairo at their feet, a breathless mass,
Dying to hear them pray, and see what came to pass !
It was a beautiful, but solemn sight
To mark the trembling children robed in white,
Painted against the red and angry sky,
Stretching their arms to Him who dwells on high !
But there they stood, and there they knelt and prayed,
And from that hour the pestilence was stayed ;
For while they prayed there came a rush of wind
That rent the clouds, and showed the sun behind ;

They saw its broad, bright light, and seemed to hear
The wave of palms, the flow of waters near.
Ah yes ! 'twas true : the Nile began to rise,
As if its springs were fed from the benignant skies !
It rose, and rolled, and ran before the breeze,
Its long waves furrowed like the stormy seas ;
Its mud was swept away : its monsters sank :
It swayed and snapped the reeds along the bank,
Raging and roaring, rising higher and higher,
Far-flaming in the sun, a sheet of windy fire !
All wept with joy. And now there came a man
Wild with good news ; he shouted as he ran
*“ There is no God but God ! Lo ! God is Great !
There stands a row of camels at the gate,
Laden for all with sacks of wheat and grain.”*
They fell upon their knees, and wept again ;
But they, the children ; meek, and undefiled,
Marched through the streets, and clapped their hands,
and smiled :
Nor was there longer plague or famine there,
Thanks be to God, who heard the children's prayer !



STANZAS.

I OFTEN wish that I could know
The fate in store for me,
The measure of my joy and woe —
The man that I shall be.
I do not fear to meet the worst
The gathering years can give ;
My life has been a life accurst
From youth, and yet I live.
The Future may be overcast,
But never darker than the Past.

My mind will grow as years depart,
With all the wingéd hours ;
And all my buried seeds of Art
Will bloom again in flowers ;
But buried hopes no more will bloom,
As in the days of old ;
My youth is lying in its tomb,
My heart is dead and cold !
And certain sad, but nameless cares
Have flecked my locks with silver hairs.

No bitter feeling clouds my grief,
No angry thoughts of thee ;
For thou art now a faded leaf
Upon a fading tree.
From day to day I see thee sink
From love, and faith, and truth ;
I sigh, but dare not bid thee think
Of what thou wert in youth :
For oh ! the thought of what thou art
Must be a hell within thy heart !

My life is full of care and pain,
My heart of old desires ;
But living embers yet remain
Below its dying fires :
Nor do I fear what all the years
May have in store for me,
For I have washed away with tears
The blots of Memory :
But thou — despite the love on high —
What is there left thee but to die !



By the margent of the sea
I would build myself a home,
Where the mighty waters be,
On the edges of their foam ;
Ribs of sands should be the mounds
In my grounds :
My grasses should be ocean weeds,
Strung with pulpy beads ;
And my blossoms should be shells,
Bleaching white,
Washed from ocean's deepest cells
By the billows morn and night.
Morn and night — in both their light,
Up and down the paven sand,
I would tramp, while Day's great lamp
Rose or set, on sea and land,
Through a sea of vapours dark
Glimmering, like a burning bark,
Drifting o'er its yawning tomb
With a red and lurid gloom !

Seldom should the morning's gold
On the waters be unrolled ;
Or the troubled queen of night
Lift her misty veil of light.
Neither wholly dark, nor bright,
Gray by day, and gray by night —
That's the light, the sky for me,
By the margent of the sea.

From my window, when I rose
 In the morning, I would mark
The gray sea in its endless throes,
 And many a bark.
As I watched the pallid sails,
 Bearing naught to me or mine,
I would conjure up the gales
 Soon to draggle them in brine :
Then, my cloak about my face,
Up and down the sands I'd pace,
Making footprints for the spray
To wash away.
Waves might break along the shore,
And thunders roar ;
I should only hear aghaft
The solemn moaning of the Past !
And if storms should come, and rain
 Pour in torrents down the sky,

What care I ?
What cares any one in pain ?
Are not tears still wrung from me,
Woe is me ! and all in vain,
Falling faster than the rain
In the sea.
But it would be over then,
And I would no longer weep :
Grief is for the sea of men ;
By God's ocean it must sleep.
Happy, happy would I be
By the margent of the sea !

Up and down the barren beaches ;
Round the ragged belts of land ;
In along the curving reaches ;
Out along the horns of sand :
Over the ledges of the rocks,
Where the surges comb their locks,
And their wreathéd buds remain,
Not to bloom again ;
Many a league and hour I stray
And watch the madness of the spray.
The caverns in its hollow wall :
Its flame-like currents mounting flow ;
Its rounding crest of frothy snow ;
Its crumbling fall :

The climbing sun in light betrayed
By a spot of thinnest shade ;
The tossing foam, the wandering plain
Of the melancholy main ;
The sea-mew darting everywhere,
Now on the water, and now in the air,
Vexing me with frantic scream,
Like a phantom in a dream —
In dreams I do behold them all,
Mixed with wave and wind ;
But hardly know, so strange they seem,
With such thoughts combined,
Whether I behold them there,
Or the sorrow and despair
In my mind,
Wandering where its tortures be,
By the margent of the sea !



CHORIC HYMN.

I.

THE little birds awake at peep of day,
When soft winds shake their nests, and leaves are
stirred ;

The buds unseal their lids beneath the spray,
Called by the dews, by mortal ears unheard ;
But thou, though we have called thee, over-loud,
Thrice with our shrillest voices, thou art mute :

But we will touch the lute,
And melt the dream that wraps thee like a cloud.
We passed along the borders of the vale,
And peeped into it from the misty hill ;
Far in its depths we heard the nightingale
Muffled in song : we hear him singing still.

We sat together all in thoughtful rest,
Last eve, and watched the golden chaff of light,
The sheaves of sunset, bounden in the West,
Stored in the closing garner of the Night :
And when pale Hesperos with silver crook
Led forth his starry flock from out their fold,

We wept together in the bosky nook,
And linked our hearts with kisses, each thrice told.
Hast thou forgot our kisses, and thine own ?
(We dreamed of those sweet kisses all the night !)
Forgot thy loving maidens, chaste and white ?
Forgot the vale, whose depths are yet unknown ?
It cannot be ! Awake, and answer " No ! "
O, say us " No ! " or we must wake, and weep :
Give us a little sign, before we go,
That we are not forgotten in thy sleep :
Think of us, one and all, as we of thee,
Both now and evermore, Persephone.

II.

Hearken ! our lutes are strung with silver wires,
That nicely suit the strain ;
Our voices melt therein, like soft desires,
Or South winds dying in a vernal rain.
The sky-lark listens in the woods apart,
Since twilight sleeping in the falling dew,
And hoards our music in his brimming heart,
Meaning a sweet repayment from the blue.
But thou art bound in slumber, deaf to all,
Mute as a little maid beneath her pall,
Heedless of dear ones coming there to weep,
Locked in the cold and everlasting sleep.
If such should be thy sleep, O what should we

Say to Demeter, in her woe divine?
And to our hearts, and all that ask and pine,
For all would then demand their lost Persephone? •

III.

Hark! hear ye not a stirring in her bower,
A rustling in the dimness of the leaves?
Ah yes! and see, the morning in its eaves,
Braids through the twinkling green a golden shower.
Strike all your lutes again, and break the bands
That Sleep has woven round her in the night;
Let melting Music with its loving hands
Slowly unwind his tangled skeins of light.
Up-gathering all thy poppies, drowsy-sweet,
And all thy syrop-urns of mandragore,
Fly! Morpheos, fly! ere Morning's wingéd feet,
Fire-sandalled, bear him to thy palace-door,
Where, waiting thee, thy Dreams
Still linger, blinded by his dazzling beams,
Fly! Morpheos, fly! with heavy-lidded eyes:
The night is done, the maiden would arise.
Awake Persephone! the finches round
Chirp to the swallows, twittering overhead;
And little crickets answer from the ground,
Hidden in tufted mosses, crisp and red.
Awake! awake! let fluggards weak and gray
Before their time, drowse out the morning hours;

Health-loving maids are up before the day,
To trample in the dew, and gather flowers.
Flowers grow around in myriads, even here,
In this dark forest, beaded thick with dew ;
They call for thee, within thy spirit's ear,
And all the happy birds are calling too,
And we thy loving maids, so dear to thee :
Then wake and rise, O rise, divine Persephone !

1849.



THE FISHER AND CHARON.

WHERE wild Laconia juts into the sea
The fisher Diotimus had his home ;
Between the waters and the woods it stood,
A wattled hut, whose floor was strewn with leaves
And crisp dry sea-weeds : when the tide came in
The surf ran up the beach, even to the door.
Here lived the fisher and his aged wife,
Doro, his second self ; she on the land,
And he upon the sea, their long lives passed.
He rose at early dawn and dragged his boat
Down to the water's edge, threw in his oars,
His lines, and bait, and then with lusty strokes
Pulled out into the gulf through clouds of mist.
The cold dark waves set shoreward, edged with foam,
The dark rocks rose, and dipt, and passed from
sight :
At last day came. All day he rowed, and fished,
Now at his lines, now sweating at the oar :
Meantime his old wife Doro sat at home,
Mending his nets, or spinning in the sun.

From shore to shore he knew the gulf, the rocks,
The curling eddies and the isles of weed ;
He knew the haunts and habits of the fish,
How best to catch them, and the bait they loved ;
The sea-birds too, his fellow fishers, they,
He knew them all. From Tenarus to Crete,
And where the beaches of Egilia break
The shining surge, which dies among their shells,
He tracked the scaly tenants of the deep.
The summer smote him with its fiercest fires,
Burned his old face, and browned his sinewy arms ;
The winter nipt him with its still cold wind,
And drenched his cloak of mats with colder rain ;
For days he saw no sun, so thick the clouds :
But cloud or sun he put to sea at dawn
Fearless, and with the dusk of eve returned ;
The sunset was a torch to light him home ;
His boat was guided by its golden flare
Straight to the shore : he saw his hut afar,
And Doro on the sands : she beckoned him :
His sharp keel cut the waves, and, ere its wake
Sank in the blackness, grated on the sand.

They lived the common life of little things
Summed up in poverty : like waves the days,
The years went by, each day and year alike,
The last alone remembered. They were young ;
Then crooked wrinkles crept about their eyes :

Then they were old. They lived, and loved, and died.

One autumn day, when tropic birds flew home,
The fisher sat beside his dying wife :
She lay upon a couch of withered leaves
That rustled as she moved ; above her hung
A coil of line, with sea-weed on its hooks ;
A wicker basket was the fisher's seat :
Their dim eyes met, and both with tears were wet.
" Hereafter, Doro, I shall weep alone,"
Said Diotimus. " Not alone," she moaned,
" For I shall walk the solemn shore of death
In tears till you shall come : " she clutched his knee,
Twisted her trembling fingers in his hand,
Looked in his face, and waited for the end.
The waters lapped the door stone, and went back ;
The tide was slowly setting out to sea,
Leaving a narrow strip of barren sand.
When all was over Diotimus rose
And called the fishers' wives to wash the dead ;
But first he placed the needful obolus,
The ferriage of the dead, beneath her tongue ;
Her spirit else had wandered by the Styx
An hundred years among the wretched ghosts.
They buried her behind the fisher's hut,
Hard by the wood, among its fallen leaves ;
The dead leaves rustled in the restless wind,

And mingled in the fisher's broken dream :
It seemed to him the leaves whereon he lay
Were stirred that night. The dead was by his side !
He rose at dawn, and rowed to sea again,
Scarce knowing what he did ; a league from shore
He saw his net was lost, or left behind :
He dropped his oar, and let the crazy boat
Drift as it would, his idle thoughts the while
Drifting about the ocean of the Past.
That day he caught no fish. He found the net,
When the wan sunset led him to his hut ;
'Twas on his bed, the pillow of the dead.
He used that net no more. Sometimes for days
He stayed within the hut, to twist his lines,
To mend his wicker baskets, or his cloak ;
And then whole days and nights he stayed at sea :
He saw the sun go down into the sea,
Plunging in flame behind the western waves ;
He saw him rise, his bath of darkness past,
And scale the purple east : wrapt in his cloak,
The bottom of the boat his only bed,
He lay and watched the stars : he saw the Bear
Steal from his hiding-place, and all night long
Prowl round the northern pole ; the Hyades
Sprinkle the threatening forehead of the Bull ;
The Fish swim through the portals of the south,
Chasing the Swan ; and in the glimmering east

The Charioteer, the Goat that suckled Jove
Perched on his shoulder, looking over Crete.
The sea-birds knew him, and, no longer shy,
Swooped down, and snatched the fish around his
boat ;

Yea, lighted on his boat, his very oars,
And screamed, and chattered of their briny loves :
He harmed them not, his thoughts were in the Past,
“ Could Time restore those days, or give her back,”
The fisher thought, “ then I could die in peace ;
But Time will not restore them, nor will she
Return to me : the dead return no more.”
“ But there’s a way to her,” the old man thought,
And stared in the dark water. “ Day and night
The gate stands wide ; a sudden flaw of wind
Might send me through it, nay, a fish’s fin
Rubbing against the bottom of the boat.
There are a thousand doors that lead to death :
I trail my fingers in the rippling brine
And dip my death ; a cup of this salt wine
Drained in the sunless sea would end my days.
But would it help me to my wife again,
My dear, dear Doro ? Does she wait for me,
There where my soul would land ? I know not
that.”

He stared in the black water more and more ;
He saw the tangled weeds, the glancing fish,

But Doro never ; only in his dreams
Did he behold her, and she seemed to weep,
Walking alone the solemn shores of Death !

But now the tropic birds were all flown home,
The autumn leaves were shed, and wintry rains
Were sown in swelling seas ; cold blew the winds.
It was too cold to live upon the sea ;
The sea was full of ice, and every spray
That lifted his frail boat froze on the prow :
Besides his boat grew frailer day by day ;
Old like himself ; it scarcely rode the waves :
A storm would swamp it. " I should find my death
In the cold waters," Diotimus said,
" But not my dear dead wife ; for though I died
I could not join the souls across the Styx,
So poor am I : I have no obolus
To fee old Charon." So he sought the shore.
He hung his nets and lines within the hut,
Stiffened with frost ; made up his bed of leaves ;
And gathered fagots in the windy wood
To feed his fire : he walked the bleak bare wood,
Lone as the wind that snapped the withered limbs ;
Also the barren beach, the stretch of sand,
Close to the tumbling wall of roaring surf.
The surf, and sand, and melancholy wood
Troubled him less, so waste and grim were they,
Than did the hut ; the memory of the dead

Peopled the lonely hut, and filled his thoughts.
He seemed to see, or saw, his vanished wife
About her household duties all the day ;
She mended nets, she spun, she built his fires :
At night he dreamed of her ; when the wind blew
'Twas she who shook his door ; when fell the rain,
Trickling upon him through the crumbling roof,
'Twas she who wept, the tears he felt were hers :
She was the ghost of moonlight on the wall !

“ I can no longer bear this loss of mine,
Here where it came upon me : I must go,
Whither I know not, but to sea, to sea ;
There is no rest, no peace for me on land.
The winter winds may freeze me, or the isles
Of ice may crush my boat ; I can but die :
But die I shall not yet, for I must seek
Charon, and ask him to forego his fee ;
Not else can rest be mine when I am dead.”
So spake the fisher one gray winter's day,
And straightway put to sea : the isles of ice
Parted before his prow, and closed astern ;
Behind the noisy flocks of spray his hut
Grew less and less : it disappeared : the beach
Sank in the sea : the woods alone were left,
The long dark belt of woods, and ragged hills.

At noon he doubled Tenarus, and beat
Northward along Laconia's western shore ;

Somewhere along the shore, Tradition said,
Within a gorge, the gates of Hades rose ;
Where, no man knew : such knowledge suits not
life.

Death brooded round that awful shore and sea ;
The dreary woods were dead ; nor leaf, nor limb
Stirred in the strong north wind that filled the sky :
Beaches were none, but rocks, a wall of rock,
With gaping caverns where the sea was lost :
No surf, no crested wave, no rippled swell
Wrinkled the sea's broad plain, and yet it moved,
Swept shoreward like a wind. There was a gulf
Between two barren mountains, whose black jaws
Devoured the light : to this the current set,
Bearing the fisher's boat ; for though his oars
Lay on the thwarts, and all his sails were furled,
He drove before the wind to the inner land.
Soon as he passed that portal of the sea
There came a change ; the thought that led him on
Slackened ; his mind grew weak ; a drowsy weight
Hung on his lids : it was as he had crossed
The leaden portals of the Land of Sleep !
All memory of his former life was lost,
Sunk in his dream : only a sense of loss
Lived in his soul, a vague and muffled grief.
He bathed his eyes in that mysterious stream
To break his slumber ; down his wrinkled cheek

The water trickled, and he tasted it :
'Twas sweet, and bitter, like forgetfulness,
A bitter sweet : he knew the river then —
Lethe, whose dreadful waters lead to death !

At last the current emptied in the Styx,
A sluggish lake, whose nearer bank alone
Was seen ; in mist the farther bank was hid :
He took his oars, and rowed to Charon's wharf.
A line of sickly willows fringed the shore,
Their ragged tresses dragging in the scum
That mantled the grim pool : a ghostly rank
Of poplars, like a halted train of shades,
Trembled ; on one a raven sat, and slept.
And here and there were single ghostly shapes,
That wandered up and down like morning mists ;
Others from somewhere inland through a gorge
Drifted and drifted, down to Charon's wharf.
Charon himself was in his dusky barge,
Just touching land ; returned from Hades : still
The furrow of his wake was on the scum.
His beard was long and ragged, and his hair
Hung o'er his brows ; the wrinkles of his face
Seemed carved in bronze or stone : a stony light
Glinted in his hard eyes, whose steady frown
Looked pity dead : no pity Charon knew.
"What man art thou ? and wherefore art thou
come ?"

“My name is Diotimus, and my home
Is in Laconia ; Doro was my wife :
She died : you ferried her across the Styx.”

“Perchance, old man : but now so many cross
I cannot long remember single souls,
Or queens, or fishers’ wives : but get thee back :
The dead and not the living come to me.”
So Charon said, and waved the fisher back.

“Not back to earth again, oh, say not that !
He who has lived for threescore years and ten,
So old am I, and lived the poor man’s life,
Once freed therefrom, not willingly returns.
From youth to age upon the dangerous sea
My days were passed ; by suns of summer scorched,
By winds of winter numbed : and tempests rose,
Great whirlwinds in the sky, and in the sea
Chasms and gulfs of night ; but all I bore,
For Doro lived ; but now that she is dead
I long to die : there is no joy in life :
Pity me then, and let me cross the Styx.”

“*He will not pity thee,*” a shadowy voice
Breathed from the shore ; “*but rather mock thy grief :*
There is no mercy shown to men in life,
Why should they look for any after death ?”
Beneath the poplar where the raven sat
This hopeless voice to Diotimus croaked :
The raven heard, and answered in his dream.

Meantime the wandering shapes had gathered round
To watch the issue ; thin at first as smoke,
Against the swaying willow branches drawn,
Their dim uncertain outlines surer grew,
Grew firm and certain : wrapt in long white robes,
That swept the ground, and o'er their faces fell
Hood-like, they stood : the wretched dead were they,
That wander by the Styx an hundred years.

"I bear the dead alone across the Styx,"

Charon replied, and smiled a grim dark smile ;

"Only the dead, nor all the dead, you see.

Prayers have been said to me, tears have been shed
For ages, as ye reckon time on earth ;

In vain : I heed not human tears or prayers !

Great kings have laid their sceptres at my feet,
Pale queens have knelt to me, and wrung their hands,
To die before their time : I sent them back !

What man art thou, that I should let thee cross ?

Go back, and live the remnant of thy life :

Live till the lords of life shall let thee die —

It cannot now be long — then come to me ;

Not as thou comest now, but with the dead :

Come with an obolus, and thou shalt cross."

"I have no obolus, but I shall cross,"

The fisher said, "for Doro waits for me."

Above the dead the silent willows leaned ;
The air was hushed ; except the poplar rods,

High over all, naught stirred : the poplars shook,
Reached by the couriers of a coming wind,
Or some impending doom ! A wind of doom
Swept through the gorge behind them, driving on
A sea of spirits, and the noise of war :
In war two mighty kingdoms then were met ;
These were the flower of both, slain in the shock.
Rushing from life to death they threw themselves
Straight into Charon's barge, or would have thrown,
But that his oar, uplifted, kept them off.
And now while clamor and confusion reigned,
Unseen, the wary fisher seized his oars
And pulled for the farther shore : before his prow
The scum was thick, and thick the matted weeds
Below the sliding keel : a faint dead scent
Burthened the waste ; nor wave, nor ripple there,
He tore his way through slime at every stroke.
Of all the slaughtered dead that stormed his barge
Not one would Charon ferry o'er the Styx,
For all were yet unburied in the field ;
He stretched his hand in vain ; no burial fee
Dropped in his greedy palm ; he drove them back.
A single ghost, a slave that died in peace,
Wealthier with one poor obolus than they,
Heroes, and valiant captains, kings of war,
Stepped in the barge, and sat at Charon's feet.
The barge was turned, and now began the chase ;

For Charon now the fisher missed, and saw
His laboring boat half-way across the stream :
He bent him to his oars, that rose and fell,
Faster, and faster, raining strokes that shook
The sea of scum, and dashed its turbid waves,
Shouting great shouts to fright the daring man :
The shouts o’ertook the fisher in his flight,
And fright a little moment chilled his heart,
But soon was strangled by the iron will
That nerved his arm, half hope, and half despair :
The crazy boat was strained in every seam,
And slow great drops oozed through her trembling
sides ;

But not the less she flew, pursued by shouts,
And frowning Charon in his gloomy barge.

But now the mist that veiled the farther bank
Grew thin, and thinner, and the fisher caught
The shore beyond, a green, low-lying shore,
Deep meadows, uplands, slopes, and happy woods
Steeped through and through with light ; and stately
Shapes

That came and went like gods : but one was still,
Hushed as a statue frozen in the moon :
It looked a woman, and her marble eye
Drank in that breathless chase across the Styx.
“Doro !” the fisher shouted, as he neared
The happy shore ; the figure seemed to hear :

“Doro! dear Doro!” — but the rest was lost,
For Charon now had reached the fisher’s boat;
His black barge struck it: down it sank like lead,
The fisher with it: but he rose again,
Breasting the surges to the blessed shore
Where Doro stood, and stretched her hands to him.
He lands; she falls upon his neck, and weeps:
Then hand in hand, their happy tears forgot,
The smiling spirits go to meet their judge: —
But Charon goes back, angry, to the dead!



GREAT AND SMALL.

A LITTLE plot of garden ground
Grew envious of a range of bowers,
That cast their shade upon its flowers,
And thus its thoughts an utterance found :

“ I envy you, ye stately bowers,
Your royal growths of trunk and bough,
With all the blooms that cluster now
Thereon, and those that fall in showers.

“ Far in the heavens ye lift your heads,
Whatever wind blows, oh, ye trees !
But these my flowers — the lightest breeze
Dashes them on their dusty beds.

“ Within your branches lodge the birds,
Rebuilding nests, and chanting lays ;
And in your shade when summer days
Are sultry lie the drowsy herds.

“Around my stalks the insects creep ;
Over my buds the beetles run,
With moths that die when day is done,
And bees that hum themselves asleep.

“Not all unloved by me the bees,
Draining my cups of honey dry :
But what are they, and what am I,
To herds, and birds, and giant trees ? ”

But Nature, listening, “Thou art wrong ! ”
Did say reproving : — “wrong ! ” the herds ;
And “wrong ! ” the many-voiced birds
Interpolated in their song.

“There is no difference with me,”
Was whispered in the garden’s ear :
“The smallest blossom is as dear
To Nature as the greatest tree.

“The pine and oak are only flowers
Grown large : they drink the beads of dew
Like little violets, meek and blue,
And battle with the stormy powers.

“The insect with its gauzy wings
Sings, and the moth and beetle grim ;

And for the bee — I doat on him,
And know by heart the tune he sings !

“ Then learn this truth, the base of all,
That all are equal, so they fill
Their proper spheres, and do God’s will :
There is no other Great or Small ! ”



THE POPLAR.

I.

THE poplar-tree that guards my house
Looks in on me to-night,
As if it would divide my shade,
Though based itself in light.
Alas, poor tree !
It knows not me ;
A mystery few explain aright.

II.

It stands out in the lamp-light there,
And shakes its twinkling leaves ;
And whatsoe'er the heavens may send,
It patiently receives :
Rain, hail, or snow,
All winds that blow, —
Whatever comes it never grieves !

III.

For me I cannot say the like,
For I *do* grieve and pine ;

There's not an hour but flirs a pang
In this weak heart of mine :
Even Pleasure pains,
And Love contains—
How much of sorrow, though divine !

IV.

Even now it fills my aching heart
With mingled gloom, and flame ;
And yet the poplar envies me
My woe without a name !
It sees my tears,
Conceives my fears,
And yearns to bear the same.

V.

No, poplar, no ! rest where you are
In wiser Nature's plan ;
Man suffers so, 'tis happier
To be a tree than man !
Your time will come,
Your martyrdom :
Till then contented, happy be,
Nor seek to share my life with me !

MISERRIMUS.

HE has passed away
From a world of strife,
Fighting the wars of Time and Life;
The leaves will fall when the winds are loud,
And the snows of winter will weave his shroud;
But he will never, ah, never know
Any thing more
Of leaves or snow!

The summer-tide
Of his life was past,
And his hopes were fading, falling fast:
His faults were many, his virtues few,
A tempest with flecks of heaven's blue.
He might have soared to the gates of light,
But he built his nest
With the birds of night!

He glimmered apart
In solemn gloom,

Like a dying lamp in a haunted tomb :
He touched his lute with a magic spell,
But all its melodies breathed of hell,
Raising the Afrits and the Ghouls,
And the pallid ghosts
Of the damned souls !

But he lies in dust,
And the stone is rolled
Over his sepulchre dark and cold ;
He has cancelled all he has done, or said,
And gone to the dear and holy dead !
Let us forget the path he trod ;
He has done with us :
He has gone to God !



THE OLD MILL.

BESIDE the stream the grist-mill stands,
With bending roof and leaning wall ;
So old, that when the winds are wild,
The miller trembles lest it fall :
And yet it baffles wind and rain,
Our brave old Mill ! and will again.

Its dam is steep, and hung with weeds :
The gates are up, the waters pour,
And tread the old wheel's slippery round,
The lowest step forevermore.
Methinks they fume, and chafe with ire,
Because they cannot climb it higher.

From morn to night in autumn time,
When harvests fill the neighboring plains,
Up to the mill the farmers drive,
And back anon with loaded wains :
And when the children come from school
They stop, and watch its foamy pool.

The mill inside is small and dark ;
But peeping in the open door
You see the miller fitting round,
The dusty bags along the floor,
The whirling shaft, the clattering spout,
And the yellow meal a-pouring out !

All day the meal is floating there,
Rising and falling in the breeze ;
And when the sunlight strikes its mist
It glitters like a swarm of bees :
Or like the cloud of smoke and light
Above a blacksmith's forge at night.

I love our pleasant, quaint old Mill,
It still recalls my boyish prime ;
'Tis changed since then, and so am I,
We both have known the touch of time :
The mill is crumbling in decay,
And I — my hair is early gray.

I stand beside the stream of Life,
And watch the current sweep along :
And when the flood-gates of my heart
Are raised it turns the wheel of Song :
But scant, as yet, the harvest brought
From out the golden fields of Thought !

1848.

THE SQUIRE OF LOW DEGREE.

I.

*The royal sunlight flushed the room,
From stained windows streaming down,
To where, rayed round in golden gloom,
The old king sat, and tried to frown.
Before him stood his daughter dear,
Her white hands folded on her breast,
And in her drooping eyes a tear,
The sign of love, and love's unrest :
For she was grieved, as only maids can be,
That love, and lose, like her, a squire of low degree.*

[THE KING SPEAKS.]

“To-morrow we ride with all our train
To meet our cousin of Aquitain ;
Be ready, daughter, to go with us there,
At the head of the train in a royal chair.
The chair shall be covered with velvet red,
With a fringed canopy overhead,
And curtains of damask, white and blue,

Figured with lilies, and silver dew.
Your robe must be purple, with ermine bands,
The finest fur of the northern lands :
Enamelled chains of rare device,
And your feather a bird of Paradise !
And what will you have for a dainty steed ?
A Flanders mare of the royal breed ?
An English blood ? A jennet of Spain ?
Or a Barbary foal with a coal-black mane ?
We still have the Soldan's harness, sweet :
The housings hang to the horse's feet,
The saddle-cloth is sown with moons,
And the bridle bells jingle the blithest tunes !
Or will you on a palfrey go ?
An ambling palfrey, sure and slow,
That shakes its head at every tread,
And tosses its heavy mane of snow :
Speak, my daughter ! or will you stay,
And make it a happy hunting day ?
The huntsmen shall all be gathered at dawn,
And the hounds led out upon the lawn ;
When you and your bevy of dames appear,
We'll spur our steeds, and chase the deer :
Through meadows, through woods, away we'll go,
And shout while the merry bugles blow !
Or you shall lead us where you will,
Down in the valley, or up the hill :

Speak, and the hawks shall wait you there,
And a noble quarry in the air.
And O ! but you are a lady bright,
On a green hill's side in the morning light ;
Your rosy cheek by the soft wind kissed,
And a dappled falcon on your wrist !
After the chase we'll feast in the hall,
Under the antlers on the wall ;
The trumpet shall wake its golden sound,
And the butler bear the dishes round :
Ribs of beef, so crisp and brown,
And a jug of Rhenish to wash it down :
Hares, and pheasants, and venison steaks,
And a boar with his skin peeling off in flakes :
And to crown the whole, a peacock dressed,
With its starry plumes, and a gilded crest.
For you and the maids, a store of spice ;
Cloves, and the seed of Paradise,
Pots of ginger from over the seas,
Honeycombs from the English trees,
Plums, dim-seen through their misty streaks,
And dishes of peaches with bloomy cheeks,
Pears that smack of the sunny South,
And cherries, as red as a maiden's mouth !
Grapes in salvers, with sprigs of vine,
And wine, wine, a river of wine ;
Ripe and old, and brave and bold,

In cups of silver, and flagons of gold :
Red from Bordeaux, white from the Rhine,
Rumney, and Malmsey, and Malespine,
Every vintage of famous wine ! ”

[THE PRINCESS ANSWERS.]

“ But I would rather have,” said she,
“ My loving squire of low degree ;
Nor gaudy trains, nor days of chase,
Reward me for his absent face.
They do but bring him back again,
And all the Past, a double pain.
I see him now ; he is my page,
A dreamy boy of tender age :
His hair is long, and bright as gold,
And in his eyes are depths untold !
'Tis dangerous, believe me, Sire,
The growth of two young hearts like ours :
We grow like flowers, and bear desire,
The odor of the human flowers !
Eyes tell the tale, though lips say naught,
And it colors the very springs of thought ;
I thought of him, and he of me,
The daring squire of low degree ! ”

II.

*The monarch's eye with anger burns,
Like one who hates, yet hears a truth ;*

*Besides his own sweet youth returns,
And pleads, but he despises youth !
The princess kneels before his chair,
And takes his heavy-hanging hand :
He does but smooth her ruffled hair,
And idle with its jewelled band :
And yet he loves her, angry though he be,
And bribes her to forget the squire of low degree.*

[THE KING SPEAKS.]

“ You shall have a mantle, silver-green,
With clasps of gold, and gems between ;
A cloak of scarlet, deep as flame,
And a wimpled hood to match the same ;
A golden comb to crown your hair,
Or even a crown, like this I wear.
Or will you that every separate curl
Shall be inlaid with a priceless pearl,
Till you shine like night in the starry hours ?
Or will you garland your brow with flowers ?
But your stately throat, like a swan’s afloat —
That must be circled with coral beads,
Or the ruby, whose heart with passion bleeds !
Kerchiefs of Holland, Mechlin lace,
And a veil like mist to hide your face ;
Embroidered gloves, and velvet hose :
And tippets to wrap you from the snows :

Eider shoes, lined from the cold,
And slippers of satin with buckles of gold.
Nor shall you tread on rushes more,
But cloth of gold shall cover your floor ;
And when you please to take the air,
But name your path, and we'll spread it there.
Your garden walks shall be trimmed anew :
And we'll try, if we can, to keep the dew :
Plant new trees, of stronger shade,
And have the summer arbors made.
You shall have a fawn with a silver bell,
A delicate fawn, that knows you well ;
A peacock, too, of the richest hue,
To strut before you, and spread its train,
Gay as the rainbow after rain !
The fountain shall play, the swans shall swim,
And feed from your hand at the basin's brim :
You shall have a shallop, with silken sail,
And oars beside, if the wind should fail :
Shall float on the lake, with a rippling wake,
Shoot with the current down the stream,
And under the arched bridges dream.
Or you shall land, if it please you more,
And have a pavilion pitched on shore :
Blue and white, like the sky in sight,
A couch of down, and a dreamy light :
An odorous silence, rapt and deep,
And sleep, the beautiful balm of Sleep !”

[THE PRINCESS ANSWERS.]

“But I would sooner have,” said she,
“My loving squire of low degree ;
For in his faith my soul reposes,
Sweeter than in a bed of roses.
Nor balmy sleep, nor happy dream,
Nor shallop on a summer stream,
Nor garden walks, nor shaded bowers,
No ! nor a perfect nest of flowers,
Shall wean me from his love divine,
Or make him any thing but mine !
And, as for jewels, pins, and rings,
Mantles, and all such paltry things,
I hold them at their proper worth,
A subject for my scorn and mirth !
You think us children, Sire, you men :
We want our playthings back again :
We must be pacified with show,
We are such simpletons, you know !
It may be so, it may be so,
But when the worst is known, and told,
We cannot all be bought and sold ;
Nor force, nor art can make us part
From something holy in the heart —
The bright and blessed love of old,
The deathless love I bear to thee,
My own dear squire of low degree !”

•

III.

*She leaned against her father's breast,
 And in her sickly sorrow smiled ;
 Perplexed, distressed, and ill at rest,
 He stooped, and kissed his weeping child.
 Her arms around his neck she drew ;
 He felt her wild heart beat, and beat :
 His own was touched, with pity too :
 He threw his kingdom at her feet :
 And yet he held her suppliant soul in fee,
 For still he plead against the squire of low degree.*


[THE KING SPEAKS.]

"The western wing, by the palace gate —
 I give it to you, with all its state :
 Deep are the halls, broad are the stairs,
 And tables of oak, and walnut chairs,
 With mirrors of Venice adorn the rooms,
 That are hushed in the heart of purple glooms !
 When the sun at his golden setting paints
 The palace-panes, and we pray to the saints,
 The Court shall in your chapel throng,
 And hear the solemn even-song :
 Threescore singers in the choir,
 And the lips of all are touched with fire !
 The priest before the altar stands,
 And lifts the Host with reverent hands ;

•

The little faery children sing,
And the incense burns, and the censers swing,
And the deep-toned organ thunders round,
Filling the aisles with a sea of sound !
You shall sup with me whenever you will,
And I'll pick you an arbor, green and still,
Drape it with arras down to the floor,
And spread your service by the door,
That when you eat you may behold
The knights at play, where the bowls are rolled ;
Then you shall to the drawbridge go,
And watch the sportive fish below,
Their glancing fins, their motions free,
Arrows of gold in a silver sea.
A beautiful barge shall meet you there,
With gilded pennons drooped in air,
And sturdy rowers, with lifted oars,
To pull you by the sedgy shores :
Step on deck, and mount your throne
Under the purple dais alone :
Your favored ladies, two by two,
And the knights you name, shall follow you :
Wave your hand, the band shall play,
And the rowers speed you on your way ;
Down the river, and past the lawn,
And up the lake, where hides the swan ;
Through glassy shadows, and drifts of light,

The bloom of eve, and the gloom of night,
Till rises the moon, when home you turn,
And land where the torches redly burn,
And the garden's roof, and its leafy bars
Glitter with cressets, like colored stars :
Then to your chamber, chaste, and white,
In the silent privacy of night.
Your room shall be hung with curtains of snow,
And a canopy over the couch shall flow :
The brodered sheet with pearls we'll strew,
Till it gleams like a lily edged with dew !
You shall have the finch that you desire,
In an ivory cage with golden wire :
It shall hang at the head of your bed, and cheep,
And meet your eyes when they close in sleep :
And to hasten the sleep we'll make the room
Drowsy with shadow and perfume :
Braziers shall melt the sweetest gum,
And its scent in your very dreams shall come !
Nay ! you shall have the ripe delight
Of the mellowest music, all the night :
And when the songs of the minstrels fail,
The sweeter songs of the nightingale :
And the heavenly strain will flood your brain,
Till heaven opens before your eyes,
And your spirit walks in Paradise ! ”



[THE PRINCESS ANSWERS.]

“But I would only have,” said she,
“My loving squire of low degree ;
For I love him, and he loves me,
And what is life when love is flown ?
We breathe indeed, we grieve, we sigh,
And seem to live, and yet we die :

There is no life alone !

Glory is but a gilded chain,
And joy another name for pain :

There is no joy alone !

But joy, or pain, it matters not,
Without my squire of low degree ;
All things are nothing now to me,
For I shall die, and be forgot.
You have another daughter still
To love you, Sire, and work your will ;
For me — awaits the convent cell,
And soon the mournful passing-bell.
No more a princess, when you hear
The woman’s dirge, and see her bier,
Forget your pride, and all beside,
And but remember she was dear !
And when the ghostly mass is said,
And prayers are chanted for the dead,
O pray that she may happy be,
And all good souls shall pray for thee !”

IMOGEN.

UNKNOWN to her the maids supplied
Her wants, and gliding noiseless round
Passed out again, while Leon's hound
Stole in and flumbered at her side :
Then Cloten came, a silly ape,
And wooed her in his boorish way,
Barring the door against escape ;
But the hound woke, and stood at bay,
Defiant at the lady's feet,
And made the ruffian retreat.
Then for a little moment's space
A smile did flit across the face
Of Lady Imogen.

Without the morning dried the dews
From shaven lawns, and pastures green :
Meantime the court dames and the queen
Did pace the shaded avenues :
And Cymbeline amid his train
Rode down the winding palace walks,

Behind the hounds that snuffed the plain,
And in the track of wheeling hawks ;
And soon in greenwood shaws anear
They blew their horns, and chased the deer.
*But she nor saw, nor heard it there,
But sat, a statue of despair,
The mournful Imogen.*

She shook her ringlets round her head,
And clasped her hands, and thought, and thought,
As every faithful lady ought,
Whose lord is far away, or dead !
She pressed in books his faded flowers,
That never seemed so sweet before ;
Upon his picture gazed for hours,
And read his letters o'er, and o'er,
Dreaming about the loving Past,
Until her tears were flowing fast !
*With aches of heart, and aches of brain,
Bewildered in the realms of pain,
The wretched Imogen !*

She tried to rouse herself again ;
Began a broidery quaint and rich,
But pricked her fingers every stitch,
And left in every bud a stain !
She took her distaff, tried to spin,

But tangled up the golden thread :
She touched her lute, but could not win

A happy sound, her skill had fled :
The letters in her books were blurred,
She could not understand a word.

*Bewildered still, and still in tears,
The dupe of hopes, the prey of fears,
The weeping Imogen !*

Her curtains opened in the breeze
And showed the slowly-setting sun,
Through vines that up the sash did run,
And hovering butterflies and bees.

A silver fountain gushed below,
The swans superbly swam the spray :
And pages hurried to and fro,

And trim gallants with ladies gay,
And many a hooded monk and friar
Went barefoot by, in coarse attire.

*But like a picture, or a dream,
The outward world did only seem,
To thoughtful Imogen.*

When curfews rang, and day was dim,
She glided to her chapel desk,
Unclasped her missal arabesque,
And sang the solemn vesper hymn :

Before the crucifix knelt down,
And told her beads, and strove to pray :
But Heaven was deaf, and seemed to frown,
And push her idle words away ;
And when she touched the holy urn
The icy water seemed to burn !
No faith had she in saints above,
She only wanted human love,
The pining Imogen.

The pale moon walked the waste o'erhead,
And filled the room with sickly light,
And she arose in piteous plight,
Disrobed herself, and crept to bed :
The wind without was loud and deep,
The rattling casements made her start :
At last she slept, but in her sleep
She pressed her fingers o'er her heart,
And moaned, and once she gave a scream,
To break the clutches of a dream !
Even in her sleep she could not sleep,
For ugly visions made her weep,
The troubled Imogen.

1848.

THE FLAMINGO.

[IN THE DESERT.]

THIN and pale the moon is shining
Where the Arab tents are spread ;
But the cloudy sky before me,
And around the burning desert,
Both are red !
And where their hues are most like blood,
Mirrored in the sluggish flood,
Down the long black neck of land,
I see the red Flamingo stand.

That bird accurst—I saw it first
On a wild and angry dawn ;
I was wakened from my slumbers
By Zuleika's stifled screaming—
She was gone !
Stolen by a turbaned horseman,
Mounted on a barb so black :
I saw her garments waving white,
And I followed, day and night,

In the red Flamingo's track.
Three whole moons have I pursued it,
With a swift and noiseless tread ;
Like a dreamer whom the demons
With a baleful lamp are leading
To the dead !
Happy are the dead ! But I,
I can never, never die,
Until my hands are red !
But red they will be soon,
For I turn my back upon the moon,
And follow the bird, that doubles its speed,
Eager to see the horseman bleed,
And dabble its beak, as I my hands,
In the blood that shall crimson the desert sands !



THE SERENADE OF MA-HAN-SHAN.

[CHINA.]

I.

Come to the window now, beautiful Yu Ying !
The new moon is rising, white as the shell of a pearl :
Your honored father and brother
And the guests are still at table,
Tipping the golden bottles —
But I have stolen to you !
The rose looks over the wall
To see who passes near :
Look out of the window, you,
And see who waits below.
I am a Mandarin : my plume is a pheasant's feather :
The lady who marries me may live at court, if she
likes.

II.

I stood by the pond to-day ; hundreds of lilies
bloomed ;
And the wonderful keung-flower grew in the midst
of all.

Whenever that marvel happens
A wedding is sure to follow :
It rests with you, Yu Ying,
Speak ! is the wedding ours ?
We will dwell in Keang-Nan,
For I have a palace there ;
My garden is leagues in length,
Deer run wild in the parks :
Cages of loories, macaws ; lakes of Mandarin ducks :
And a lane bordered with peach-trees : all for sweet
Yu Ying.

III.

What means this wonderful light ? has a second
moon arisen ?
'Tis Yu Ying at her window ! A million of thanks,
Yu Ying !
Drop me your fan for a gift,
Or, better, a tress of your hair :
It is but little to give,
For I have given my heart !
The fire-flies twinkle, twinkle,
Under the cypress boughs :
They are wedding each other to-night,
The lights are their wedding lanterns !
When shall I order ours, and come in the flowery
chair ?
Name me the pearl of a day, my bride, my wife, Yu
Ying !

THE SLEDGE AT THE GATE.

[LAPLAND.]

I WOULD run this arrow straight into my heart
Sooner than see what I saw to-night !
I harnessed my rein-deer, mounted the sledge,
And skimmed the snow by the northern light :
The thin ice crackled, the water roared,
But I crossed the fiord :
I reach the house when the night is late,
What's this ? a deer, and a sledge at the gate !

O the eyes of Zela are winter springs !
But the wealth of summer is in her hair ;
But she loves me not, she is false again :
Or why are the sledge and the rein-deer there ?
I throw myself down, face-first in the snow :
“ *Let the false one go !* ”
She never shall know my love, or my scorn,
For I shall be frozen stiff in the morn !

The sharp winds blew, and my limbs grew chill :
I knew no more till I felt the fire.

They rubbed my breast, and they rubbed my hands,
And my life came back, like a dark desire.
She spake kind words, and smoothed my hair,
But the fledge was there!
“*Ah false, but fair!*” — it was all I said,
I struck her down, and away I fled!

I mounted my fledge, and the rein-deer flew,
In the wind, in the snow, in the blinding fleet:
The snow was heavy, the wind like a knife,
And the ice like water under my feet.
The wolves were hungry — they scented my track —
But I fought them back!
I fear neither wolves, nor the winter's cold,
For the faithless woman has made me bold!



THE GRAPE GATHERER.

[ITALY.]

WELL, I have met you, cousin,
Where not a soul can see :
What do you want ? “ You love me ? ”
You trifle, Sir, with me.
You love that grape-girl yonder —
The one against the wall :
She climbs, and climbs ; but have a care,
A step, and she may fall.
You walked with her this morning,
Her basket on your head :
“ ’Twas better than my coronet,”
Or something so, you said :
“ And the grapes and yellow tendrils
Tangled in her hair,
Were brighter than my ringlets,
And all the pearls I wear ! ”
You should have seen her lover,
Hid in the vines hard by ;
A swarthy, black-browed fellow,
With a devil in his eye :

He clutched his grape-hook fiercely,
And, but that I were near,
He would have flain you, cousin,
And will some night, I fear.
You think she loves you only !
And so thought all the rest :
Why, you had hardly left her
Before the Count was blest !
You doubt ? Pray ask her sister,
Or ask the jilted swains ;
Or watch, when she's not watching,
'Twill well be worth your pains.
I should be very angry,
'Tis so unworthy you :
But since you say "you jested,"
I must forgive, and do.
I own I love you somewhat ;
But ere you marry me,
You must do one thing, cousin —
Let my grape gatherers be !



SICILIAN PASTORAL.

THE nests in spring were full of bluish eggs,
In summer full of birds : now autumn comes
The nests are empty, and the birds are gone.

The soft white clouds are flecked, the sky is bound
With belts of swallows, stretching from the west
To where the east is girded in with haze.

Stay ! swallows, stay ! the land is near and bright,
The sea is far, and dark, and perilous,
And all beyond is alien, and unknown.

Why should ye fly so soon ? why fly at all,
When ye might stay with us the long year through,
And be in deathless summer all the time ?

Here all the vales are full of dewy flowers,
The orchard plots are full of juicy fruits,
The endless purple woods are full of balm !

Stay! swallows, stay! the flowers, and fruit, and
balm

Will fade and die, when ye have left the isle,
And winds will moan the absence of your songs!

Stay! swallows, stay! and hear the last year's birds :
“ *We flew o'er many an isle where summer broods,
But found no summer-land like Sicily !* ”

They will not hear: we waste our words in air :
We might as well go chatter to the crows :
The crows would hear us, though they meant to go.

Go! swallows, go! and be it all your doom
To bear the memory of what ye leave —
For memory will cancel half the sin :

And be it all your punishment to sing
In tropic islands of Sicilian sweets,
And shame the tropic birds with summer songs!





[PERSIA.]

WE parted in the streets of Ispahan.
I stopped my camel at the city gate ;
Why did I stop ? I left my heart behind.

I heard the sighing of thy garden palms,
I saw the roses burning up with love ;
I saw thee not : thou wert no longer there.

We parted in the streets of Ispahan.
A moon has passed since that unhappy day ;
It seems an age : the days are long as years !

I send thee gifts by every caravan ;
I send thee flasks of attar, spices, pearls ;
I write thee songs on golden-powdered scrolls.

I meet the caravans when they return.
“ What news ? ” I ask : the drivers shake their heads :
We parted in the streets of Ispahan.

THE SEARCH FOR PERSEPHONE.

BOOK II.

*“ Proserpine gathering flowers,
Herself a fairer flower, by gloomy Dis
Was gathered, which cost Ceres all that pain
To seek her through the world.”*

No more of rural song and pastoral,
Profuse or studied, but a higher strain ;
Thee now I woo, divine Melpomene :
Thou didst inspire tragedians grave, of eld,
To sing of Godlike suffering, and embalm
In monumental verse the woe of Gods ;
Much did they sing, but much remains unsung,
And chief Demeter's woe, which now is mine.
O help me, as thou didst thine elder bards ;
Order the lofty numbers, build the style
In naked and severe simplicity,
And lift my spirit to the argument,
Which deepens soon to tragic. Breathe through me,
Voiceless myself, and thine be all the wreaths.

Where is Demeter now? what troubled look
Burthens her face, what solemn words the air?
Demeter stands beside the spring which rose
Where Aides vanished with Persephone:
Of port superior to the loftiest
Of mortal mould, in Queen, or Amazon
Renowned, the light and pillar of the sex;
Deep-bosomed, and white-limbed, a supreme Shape.
Her face is pale with sorrow, yet she wears
Her sorrow grandly, like a diadem,
Nor other crown, though Goddess of the Earth,
Except the simple tiar of golden hair
Coiled round her brow, an orbéd peak of thought.
Her voice is sadder than an autumn wind
In a lone land, not shrill, nor full of gusts,
But equal, and deep-toned, blown from all points.

“I have been listening, wrapt in searching thought,
To what, in trembling words, the nymphs revealed,
But where my child has gone, I cannot tell;
My foresight failed me here, my knowledge fails.
Wisdom will come, till when its place usurped
Is filled by grief. Perchance some River God
Hath stolen my child, whom he will soon return,
Unharméd, for fear of me, so potent I.
This fountain must be questioned. Answer me,
Soul of this coil of foamy turbulence,

Whether thou art beneath the wide, waste sea,
With great Poseidon, and his finny train,
Or in the deeps of Earth, in caves obscure,
Up-hastening to the light, at this, my call,
Speak, answer me, where is Persephone?
Thou hast beheld, and stolen her away,
Thou, or some other spirit mischievous,
Whose portal of retreat was opened here.
Where is my daughter? If I speak again,
The Earth will draw thy fountain to its source,
And cast thee from her bosom. Answer me!
In vain, in vain: the fountain hath no God,
And cannot answer; Godless let it be,
Stormy and bitter to the end of time.
But you, ye lesser spirits of the vale,
Cannot escape, I here compel ye all;
From rivers, brooks, and springs, you Naiads, come,
With Napeads from the vale; and from the grove
The Meliads, who here for lack of flocks
Must tend the fruit; and you, ye Oreads,
Both from the valley and the mountain mists;
Hither, and tell me of Persephone."

The Goddess thus, and even as she spake,
From rivers, brooks, and springs the Naiads came,
With water lilies tangled in their hair;
The Napeads from the vale in skirts of grass,

The Meliads with their white hands full of fruit ;
And all the Oreads from the shifting mists,
Wringing their dewy tresses on the lawn ;
Obedient to the power that summoned them,
They thus made answer in their several turns.

“ We are the Naiads of the neighboring streams ;
Below their wrinkled waves we live in grotts,
Paven with furrowed sands ; the shelvy rocks
Our thrones, our couches beds of humid moss.
We strain the water through our golden hair :
With flowers we sow the bottom, and with weeds
Whose blooms are full of winds. We love the fish
Whose little coats are fleck with glittering scales :
The plated turtles, and defiant crabs,
That lie, or crawl beneath the grayish stones,
The long-legged beetles skimming o’er the waves,
With other watery insects, are our care :
We know and love the least : but as we hope
To keep our silver urns forever full,
We all are ignorant of Persephone.”

“ But I,” said one, the Naiad of a lake,
“ I saw the nymph, and she was lovelier
Than all my lilies, whiter than my swans ;
But where she hides I know not, or may fires
Shed from the Dog-Star dry my fountains up,
And leave me shelterless on burning sands.”

“And we,” the drooping Napeads began,
“Surrounded by her train we saw the nymph
Trip down the vale. We woke the early flowers,
And turned the dew from their enamelled cups ;
Not one but wanted to resign its life
Beneath her feet : to die such death were sweet :
She walked as lightly as the winds of Spring.”

“The winds of Spring,” the Meliads broke, and
joined
The broken thread of speech, “the winds of Spring
Blow in old Winter’s teeth, and rouse the buds ;
The winds of Summer overtake the Spring,
And swell the buds to fruit : both are our care.
We screen the buds with leaves, remove the worms,
And drive away the bees, and angry wasps ;
We feed the fruit with sun, and wind, and dew ;
The rinds of some we gild, and some we kiss,
And leave our breath thereon in bluish mist.
We saw at dawn the nymph Persephone
Loft in our orchards ; figs, and plums, and pears
Lay round in heaps ; we rained the olives down,
The red pomegranates split, and pierced the myrrh,
And manna-tree whose veins are full of balm !
With many a sweet delay the virgin passed,
But where she hides we know not, or may blight
Shrivel our leaves, the north winds nip our buds,

And worms destroy our fruit, henceforth to be
More rich and luscious than in other years ! ”

“ We dwell in mists,” began the Oreads next ;
“ In vale and mountain mists ; a streak of gold
Betrays our presence there ; in hollow glens
We couch when dews are dried : among the hills,
From peak to peak, we float across the gulfs,
And leap in cataracts down the untouched crags.
May all our dews and exhalations fail,
But we are ignorant of Persephone.”

“ Infirm, and idle ! wherefore do ye live,
If not to see, and succour Excellence,
When Excellence may need your timely aid ?
Is it for this that Earth’s maternal care
Protects, and clasps ye to her loving heart ?
For this Heaven holds ye in its sacred charge ?
But thou, O Earth ! great Mother of Mankind !
If these, thine own appointed ministrants,
Neglect their calling, thou shouldst rise thyself,
And save the heavenly ones whose lives are thine,
And unto thine add joy, and length of days.
Back to your homes, and little tasks again,
Ye spirits of this dark, accursed vale,
And leave me in my loneliness alone !
To be a Goddess now avails me not,

Nor yet to have a Goddess for my child.
With sleepless eyes the island must be searched ;
Obscure and wild the dark retreat must be
For me to fear ; a mother's eyes are keen,
A mother's heart is strong to save her child.
Farewell ye groves of Enna, where we dwelt !
Farewell, ye meadows ! when I come again,
I bring Persephone, or come no more."

Thus spake Demeter as she crossed the vale
To search its northern bounds, which lovelier grew
At every step, the home and haunt of Spring.
Through groves and orchards full of piping birds,
That dropped from bough to bough, like falling buds,
Through emerald meadows sown with silver dew,
And golden pastures resonant with bees,
The Goddess passed, with keen and anxious eyes
Perusing all ; nor did she cease to call
"*Persephone !*" — but trace of her was none,
Save in her shoutings, which the vale retained,
As hollow shores the voice of ebbing seas.
Then through a gorge along the east she went
The mountains on her right fledged with dark pines,
And on her left the long Nebrodian range,
The craggy barriers of the northern sky ;
The wind blew downward from their summit snows
Freighted with winter, and the melting mist,

Heavy and damp, rolled up and down the gorge ;
And up and down the gorge the Goddess went,
Scanning the figures shrouded in the mist ;
And one by one the Hours with solemn pace
Did come and go, and Morning was no more.

There was a wild and desolate ravine
That wound along the bottom of the pass ;
Its misty sides were dark with shaggy woods,
And from its verge, headlong, a river plunged
Through clouds of spray, deep down a troubled lake,
Dammed up with rocks, down which it plunged
again,
In ragged cataracts, sullen and hoarse ;
A narrow pathway coiled on rocky shelves,
With steep descents traversed the precipice :
Down this with wary feet Demeter trod,
And searched the old and melancholy woods
Burthened with endless shade, and solitude,
And searched the clouded lake, and waterfall,
And all the cavernous bases of the hills,
Deep-sunk in earth ; no nook, nor secret cleft,
In which a spotted adder and her brood
Could coil away, escaped her sharpened eye,
That found no traces of Persephone ;
So up the pass with flow and toilsome steps
She clomb again, and reached at last a plain
That stretched along the west, and slept in light.

Till now nor sight nor sound of man appeared,
But now at intervals shepherds were seen,
And notes of shepherd's flutes were heard afar.
Here dwelt a pastoral race that worshipped Pan,
Nor far the Goddess journeyed ere she found
A group around his altar ; reverent swains
With sacrificial goats, and pious maids
With urns of honey wreathed in sprigs of pine ;
And in their midst the venerable Priest :
Deep awe pervaded all as thus she spake.

“ Shepherds ! since dawn the nymph Persephone
By hostile force from Enna has been ta'en ;
If any man has seen her, let him speak,
Let him not fear, but speak, and name her path.
We both are kind to you, nor love you less
Than if you worshipped us, instead of Pan ;
Witness the bees I charmed from Hybla here,
When last the sun flamed in the vernal signs,
With all that shall hereafter come of good
To him, whose happy knowledge touching her —
If any such there be — lightens my heart ;
Good, if he speak, evil, if he speak not,
To him, and all his kindred after him ;
But such there cannot be. Speak ! shepherds, speak ! ”

The Goddess thus, and paused, but none replied,

So deep the dread that fell upon all hearts ;
At length the Priest ventured with faltering tongue.
“ O great Demeter ! Goddess of the Earth !
Impute not sin to silence, neither charge
Thy loss to us, participants therein —
For who but suffers when the good are wronged ?
Forgive our ignorance of Persephone,
And elsewhere let thy just displeasure fall.”

To whom Demeter mild, and sad, returned ;
“ Old man ! ’twould ill become the race divine,
Divine no less through justice, than through power,
Instead of Wrong, to punish Ignorance.
For if the Gods unjust and cruel prove,
How shall their worshippers be good and kind ?
But fear not that ; lifted above the world,
No mortal frailties their perfections mar.
Though sad at heart, right glad am I withal
To see ye love and reverence the Gods ;
No grateful heart enjoys the least of gifts
Without returning to the giver thanks,
And offering in return the best it can.
Not that the Gods are ever paid thereby,
For what to them are honey, goats, or bulls ?
They need them not, nor need they hymns of praise,
For they are all sufficient in themselves ;
Yet dear to them the clouds of sacrifice,

That waft above the prayers of thankful hearts ;
It is their due, the makers of mankind."

Thus through her grief accents of wisdom fell.
Assured thereby they bowed, and worshipped her :
But mindful of her search, too long delayed,
She journeyed o'er the plain with added speed,
Till many-wooded Etna came in sight,
And the hot sun rounded the arch of Noon,
Descending to its western base of sea.

Ten leagues from Enna blue Simetos rolled
Through osier banks his current to the main.
Bathing her burning forehead in the waves,
She saw the image of the River God,
Obliquely mirrored in a bed of reeds ;
Him she addressed, and at her call he rose,
With dripping locks crowned with a wreath of sedge.
" Son of Oceanos ! whom ocean owns
No longer for its God, but still doth hide
In some deep cavern, while Poseidon rules
His sovereignty of sea — beloved of both,
Divine Simetos ! if thou hast beheld
Since early dawn the nymph Persephone,
Stolen from Enna by some Power unknown, —
Haply from spring, or stream, or far-off main,
Unfold what thou dost know : or knowing naught

Since I would cross thy current in my search,
Draw back thy waters to their mountain source
And let me pass ; so may the mountain snows
Fail not to brim thy fountain, and thy mates,
Camsorus, Chrysos, and bright Eryces,
Empty their urns of tribute at thy feet.”

“ O great Demeter ! Mother of the Earth !
Sower of seed, and source of fruitfulness !
With grief I hear thy melancholy voice,
Laden with loss, which I cannot repair,
For naught hath passed since dawn. I will draw back
My current to its source, and let thee cross.”

Thus he, and northward buffeted the waves,
Till loft around the river's westward curve ;
Reaching its source he sealed its secret urn,
And stayed the current, which rolled on below,
And left a gulf, through which the Goddess passed,
With unwet sandals over waves of grass,
Through rounded walls of crystal, rolling down
Tumultuous in her rear, in crumbled foam,
That shut the pass, and followed in her path,
Until she gained the river's eastern bank,
And shouted to Simetos, who unsealed
The dripping urn, when all the waters closed,
And sought the sea again, as she her child.

Her path now wound about the southern base
Of Etna, floping to the river's edge ;
Here Polyphemos fed his numerous flock,
That lay like drifts of snow in dreamy vales,
Until Demeter's shadow, dark and tall,
Searching the uplands chased them o'er the hills ;
All fled in fear, save one whose lamb was lost,
A fearless ewe, that to the Goddess came,
And made its sorrow known with piteous tears ;
She would have left it in the fields, but lo !
It followed her, and bleated for its lamb.
So towards the sea they went, and reached at last
Its rippled margent, where the Cyclops lay,
Under a ledge of rocks that made a cave ;
Beside his feet a nameless river ran,
Now named and known from Acis, buried there.
Here Polyphemos languished in the sun ;
Like some rude idol dusk barbarians
Adore no longer, tumbled from its base.
Thrice did the Goddess shout a mighty shout
Above his couch, before he stirred a limb,
Then slow, and sullen, he arose and frowned ;
But she stood calm as Thought, nor feared his
strength.

“ O Polyphemos ! great Poseidon's son !
Noblest of all the Cyclopean race !

Shepherd of Etna, and its thousand flocks,
From thee, Demeter claims a patient ear,
Attentive to her sorrow and despair,
That seek the footprints of Persephone,
Stolen from Enna by some wanton Power ;
Not thee she fain would hope, since thou art great,
And should'ft be kind, for kindness is the star
That crowns all greatness, therefore crowneth thee,
If thou haft harmed not her defenceless child,
Sunk, as thou seem'ft, in sorrow and despair,
From ills unknown to her, for which nathless
She grieves, and pities thee, as thou doft her,
Meaning to tell her of Persephone ;
Till when she waits, a-hungered for thy voice."

Thus with wise words, like oil upon the sea
Swollen with storm, she laid his rising ire,
And smoothed his rugged features to a calm.

"Not I," he said, "not I have done this thing,
Whoever may ; not I go stealing maids :
I live, and die, for Galatea alone.
Why, I have lain all night in falling dew,
And sang of Galatea to every star ;
And I have shouted from the cloven peaks
Until the Thunder answered from his cave,
While startled Lightnings glared from parting clouds !

“ O Galatea ! divinest Galatea !
Well I remember when I saw thee first !
'Twas when at noon I lay along the bank
Of blue Simetos, where my thirsty flock
Crowded and pushed until the lamb fell in,
To drown, but for thy help, so strong the tide
That bore it out beyond my reaching crook,
But not beyond those delicate hands of thine,
Reaching from out the lilies that concealed
Thy whiter breast, to which the lamb was drawn,
Bleating for joy, and safely borne ashore,
Beneath thy loosened hair, that like a veil
Fell to thy feet, and sowed a shower of pearl !
O Cyclops ! Cyclops ! it were well for thee,
Had thy one eye been blinded like Orion's,
Or ever thou hadst seen that fatal sight !

“ But hearken yet, Demeter, let me speak,
And I will guide thee to the mountain path
That winds about the forges of Hephaestos.

“ Again at noon she came, and fed the lamb
With handfuls of long grass, and wove the flowers
To crown her dripping tresses while I went
Through Hybla, drumming on the hollow oaks
Swarming with bees, till I had filled my cup
With lucent honey, which I gave to her ;

For then she did not fear to let me sit
Beside her feet, nor fear my gifts of love ;
But when she left me, floating like a swan
To seek the sea again, blew kisses back !
Had I been blest with fins, like happy fish,
I would have followed in her glittering wake,
And scared away the amorous River Gods ;
But had I been a River God myself,
I would have dived to her in the cold deeps ;
Be sure I had not failed to find her there,
For ruffled waves are clear as air to me ;
And oft, at noon, I watched her rising flow
Through shimmering leagues of water, like a star.

“ I gave her ten young fawns as black as night,
Soft-eyed, and delicate, with silver feet,
With each a collar, and a chain of pearl.
She clapped her hands for joy, and smoothed my
cheek
Until I laughed, and wept : her hands were soft ;
But mine are rougher than the mountain briars !

“ But hearken still, and let me speak again,
For now I touch upon my grief, and loss,
Which had not been but for another's love
Thrust in between mine own and Galatea,
Whom all the shepherds worshipped, but afar,

Till Acis came, and spake. How did he dare
Step in between the Cyclops, and his love?
And how could she endure his boyish face
Half-hid in yellow ringlets, after me,
Whose mighty heart pulsed fire at every beat!

“But let me speak again, and I have done.
I sat, last eve, upon the slope of hills,
What time the sunset tipped, as now, the woods,
And saw a double shadow on the mead,
Two shadows clasped in one, with kissing lips;
'Twas Acis, and the faithless Galatea.
They were too busy then to think of me,
But I—I saw them there, and spake no word,
But crept in silence, up from peak to peak,
Till, with sore labor, straining all my strength,
I lifted from its bed a crag of rock,
And cast it down upon the dreaming fools,
Thinking to crush them both, nor had I failed,
But that its falling shadow like a cloud
Startled the nymph, who suddenly leaped aside
To see him crushed, and buried, where he stood,
Jammed in the hard cold earth, despite his moans;
Nor might her tears, which fell around like rain,
Nor all her prayers, restore him to her arms,
Unless she found him in the turbid stream
Which gushed from out the rock, and followed her,
Flying with shrieks of terror to the sea!

“But come, Demeter, let us rise and go ;
The lean gray wolves will soon begin to prowl,
And I must pen my flocks ; but let us go.”

Thus Polyphemos told his tale of love :
And spying at his feet the bleating ewe,
He lifted it with care in his rough arms,
And led the Goddess from the foamy beach,
Full to the west again, where now the Sun
Had plunged his broad red disc in seas of cloud.

1851.



THE BURDEN OF UNREST.

I.

FROM our bridal chamber, dearest, we behold the
stretch of bay ;

From the window watch the sunset, mirrored on
its glassy floor :

Here in brightness, there in shadow, trace the fading
steps of Day,

Fainting in the west behind us, dying on the solemn
shore.

Splendors on the liquid surface, isles of purple, waves
of gold ;

On the peaks of cloudy mountains streaks of red
and lurid fires,

Blackening, as the eve expires,

Like December's latest embers turning now to ashes
cold.

Kiss me ere I lose you wholly, in the darkness mel-
ancholy ;

Through the gloom that gathers round us leave
your little hand in mine :

Now grow dimmer, Night ! and glimmer,
 'Till the stars begin to shine :
We are folded from the darkness in a cloud of light
 divine !

II.

Are you happy, sweetest ? Do you in your spirit
 feel serene ?

I am saddened, I am restless, and I feel the touch
 of tears ;

Not for any recent sorrow, but the season, and the
 scene,

And the yet remembered burden of my desolated
 years !

You *are* happy, I can see it, dawning on your pallid
 cheek,

And your clasping hand confesses all my love
 desires to know ;

So I pray you, while you listen, let my troubled spirit
 speak,

And in words relieve its woe.

I am not of those who babble, be my suffering what
 it may ;

Not for me poetic whining ; all such weakness I
 despise :

With my nature wrapt around me I pursue my silent
 way,

While a vague but settled purpose hardens in my
dreamy eyes !
Yet the silence weighs upon me, and the night de-
mands a tongue ;
Therefore let me speak, my darling ! even let my
soul complain ;
Years of utter silence give me right to speak what
will relieve me,
Right to babble like the young,
Since it will relieve my pain :
Hear me, then, and my confession shall not trouble
you again !

III.

I.

Ah ! that bitter, bitter burden ! who besides myself
has known it ?

From a myriad I was singled for its ministry and
doom :

None that bear it, if there be such, have the honesty
to own it ;

Living they are voiceless, and voiceless is the tomb !
I that bore it, I that bear it, hardly understand it yet ;
'Tis not easy to see clearly through the distance of
regret.

First were longings, vague and hopeless as the glances
cast above,

When the moon and stars are shining in the infinite
of night ;
Then a dream of something bright ;
’Twas the bliss, the sorrow — Love !
With love my dreams grew clear, and from out their
skirts of mist,
Clad in robes of white, came a bevy of fair girls ;
Each a fairy princess, a fairy lover kissed,
On her drooping eyelids, on her golden curls,
And the red mouth, dropping pearls !
From sweet lips plucking kisses, from bright eyes
drinking flame,
From warm hearts hoarding passion, what heart
had I for care ?
A cavalier of olden time, my love a noble dame,
While lavish Fancy built me a castle in the air !
To airy jousts and tournaments I rode in gallant show ;
No matter who opposed me, I cleared the tented
field ;
A lady’s favor on my crest, a heart upon my shield,
A bleeding heart below !

2.

I was young, that was the reason, why my fancy was
so wild ;
And ’tis natural to love, in the simpleness of
youth ;

Even in manhood, if it keepeth any remnant of
its truth :

Surely then it was a trifle, in a child !

Nay, though I have learned to hate it, with a host of
weighty reasons,

(Holding true to its Ideal, in the midst of all my
hate !)

There are none, I think, exempted, none but suffer
in their seasons,

Loved and loving, soon or late.

Loveless, friendless, from the first, and with solitude
accurst,

My soul did sigh, and moan :

I wanted some one near me, some loving one to
cheer me ;

For who can cheerful be, or good, or human, when
alone !

Mine eyes went searching round, for something never
seen, -

By either Night, or Day ;

I stretched my arms to clasp my fancy's queen,

That paragon of clay !

I stretched my loving arms, and clasped her in my
sleep,

Wound myself about her in a coil of fire ;

And my hot lips kissed her with passionate desire,
Brow, and face, and bosom, until I woke to weep !

3.

Thrilling with my youthful longings, which anticipated thee,

Dreams were mine of bridal chambers, and they colored all my song ;

Like the rosy hues of evening, settling yonder on the sea,

Blending with the waves, whose motion wafts the dying flame along !

But my songs were of the senses, running over with desire ;

Dim seraglios in the tropics, steeped in all their bloom and fire ;

Shaded lamps, and burning odors ; flagons of the ripest wine ;

Purple curtains, downy couches, and sultannas veiled in tresses ;

Sighing rapture, showering kisses, intertwining last caresses,

And the ecstasy divine.

Is it any wonder, dearest, now the madness is confessed,

Now the road again is traversed, every bramble, every thorn,

Where the feet of youth were torn,

That my burning years were wasted with the Burden of Unrest ?

IV.

When the flower of youth is on us, and the heart of
youth is warm,

And the passions are awakening with the warranty
of heaven,

Sins of passion may be looked for : will not do us
any harm ;

Must be overlooked, forgiven !

God himself is Love, they tell us ; surely he'll for-
give us then :

Punish all who err in loving, you destroy the race of
men !

Loving, I must not be fettered, but must rove where
e'er I please ;

You, dear women, are but flowers, we, poor men,
are only bees !

As for me, I am a poet, with the fullest license here ;
Favorite of the gods, they wink at all my peccadil-
loes dear :

But 'tis none for me to love you, for I never do you
wrong ;

If I rob you of your honey, don't I pay you with my
song ?

Tush ! no virtuous surprise,

You are willing, there's a witness in your dear con-
senting eyes !

Like a Bacchante wild with revel, intertangled in a
vine,

With his flagons running over till his feet are deep
in wine —

Oh, what days of fiery passion, oh, what wafting
nights were mine !

V.

I.

I lived the life the gods live, so beautiful and strong ;
So right in all its sweetness, in all its sin so wrong :
The life that youth delights in, and lives, but lives
not long ;

For either falls a darkness that palls upon the clay,
Or comes the King of Darkness, and bears the soul
away !

Nor know I which is saddest, the dying, and the
tomb,

Or the living, and the doom !

2.

By the hell within my bosom, I am hurried to and
fro ;

Just to see the waters flowing, just to hear the breezes
blow :

Whether I am crushing flowers, whether wading in
the snow,

Know I never : no such knowledge will avail my
foolish woe !
Up and down the noisy city, in its dusty, crowded
streets,
Where its ocean of existence on the stony pavement
beats ;
When the sun from morn to even flounders in a
waste of clouds ;
When the sickly lamps are flickering, dying in their
stormy shrouds :
In a shroud of anguish walking, like a corpse that
should be dead,
Or a dreamer in his slumbers, by a horrid phantom
led ;
(Through the dim, mysterious chambers, up the
spirit-haunted stairs,
Down the house-top, while the watchers hush their
unavailing prayers !)
Up and down the silent city, through the dreary
blank of walls ;
Where the houses drift forever, where the starless
shadow falls !

3.

Weary is existence, will it never end ?
Shall I never know it—death's eternal sleep ?
Death ! I have no other, won't you be my friend ?
I cannot live so longer ! I cannot even weep !

VI.

I.

Weep? and wherefore should I? Grief is unavailing,

And tears are not for manhood; we must not whine
like boys:

The malice of our natures is ancient, and unfailing;

The gods are jealous of us, their images and toys!
They sit up in the clouds there, and do whate'er
they please,

While men walk in the dust here, and follow their
decrees!

And I am one among ye, ye myriads of men,

Though not like ye in essence, nor like ye curst
and blest:

For ye in alternation may weep, and smile again,

While I am always laden with burdens of unrest.

What have ye done, what do ye, unless indeed your
worst,

Ye many as the grasses, or billows of the main?
But billows flow, and grasses grow, as ordered from
the first;

But ye, how are ye growing? What learn ye
here, save pain?

2.

Ye live upon a grand old world in unimagined space;

Beneath ye verdant continents, the heaving seas
around ;
Above, a host of starry lights that stare ye in the face,
Or would, indeed, but that your eyes are fixed
upon the ground !
Why stare ye on the ground so, when stars are in
the sky ?
Is it to watch the spring-flowers that twinkle in
the mold ?
Not so : nor think ye of your graves, though Death
is ever nigh,
But only of the gold beneath, the curséd, curséd
gold !
When ye were boys, my brothers, in the merry years
of old,
There was a pomp and beauty about the changing
day ;
Some little worth in youth and love, some grief at
their decay ;
But the world has taught ye better ; there's nothing
now but Gold !
Ye worship golden idols, no matter what they be,
Were I well gilded over, ye'd worship even me !
Forever o'er the ledger, (its missal,) Trade is bent,
And the age responds, (its sole amen!) "*Per cent !
per cent ! per cent !*"
Were this all, I would not murmur : Nay ! I do not
murmur now ;

There is something in the custom even I myself
avow ;

There's a dignity in dollars, and a wisdom hid in gold,
Which the poor man cannot fathom, howsoever wise
and bold.

3.

Not for this I blame ye, brothers, nor that ye reject
the flowers,

See no glory in the starlight, know no meaning in
the wind ;

Not for angels look I, hope I, in a world like this of
ours ;

I only ask for *men*, but men I cannot find.

All your actions, public, private, lack a certain manly
tone ;

Either ye are arrant cowards, else ye are absurdly
brave :

Either to himself, or others, man is more or less a
flave,

Not the king and god he should be, with his heavenly
realm and throne.

In yourselves ye might be royal, might be every
thing ye would ;

But for help ye call in others, when the one alone is
good !

First in youth your hearts are tender ; (granite, not
so hard as mine !)

And with melting eyes ye wander, and ye sigh
your souls away :
Others answer, 'tis their instinct ; both your lusty
arms entwine,
Both are kissing painted clay !
Who would pin his faith on woman, whom the
lightest whim can move ?
There is something half degrading in the very name
of love !
Love yourselves, your dogs, your horses, even the
cheats of dice and wine ;
But for women — would your fancies were but half
as free as mine !

4.

Then ye call in priests and monarchs, and are fain
to summon more ;
But they shut and bar the door :
Man within himself is prisoned, and his jailers guard
the cell,
Terrible with bristling bayonets, and the keys of
heaven and hell :
Hell with all its noxious vapors never spawned such
deadly twins :
Priests and monarchs ! ye must answer all our aggregated
sins !
From our weakness and our error, working on our
love and terror,

Priests have shapen many idols, and are shaping
many more :
Each in his peculiar fashion elevates some human
passion,
Deifies some mortal evil for his fellows to adore.
Pillared temples, marble statues, smoking altars,
silver shrines,
Formed the frame of ancient creeds :
Mostly, all the moderns keep it, with a score of new
designs,
Pictures, crucifixes, beads !
And to bind our spirits firmer, working in their
addled brains,
Priests have feigned, or found, and added hell itself
to their domains.
'Tis enough to make one merry ! Nay ! I care not
for your ban ;
Good my masters, hell is only in the wicked heart of
man :
The black hearts that have enslaved us, since the
very world began !

5.

Also you, ye gilded monarchs, in your tinsel robes
of state,
Ye are cheats and demons also, worthy our pro-
foundest hate !

And ye have it, and my counsel does not end in
hate alone ;

Up! ye nations! kill your tyrants! level prison,
palace, throne !

Yet I know not, nor advise ye. Why should ye
again be free ?

Vassals! even when ye are so, ye are soon enslaved
again :

Slavery has made ye heedful ; use has made your
fettters needful ;

Let them be !

Think what bayonets oppose ye ; think what thou-
sands must be slain ;

Think of Liberty's disasters ; think of grim Religion's
key,

Then, go supplicate your masters, soul and body on
its knee,

Slaves again !

Slaves, I hate ye! hew your wood, and draw your
water ;

'Tis the best for dogs like you ;

Beasts of burden! bear your burdens, march to
slaughter!

Hecatombs, the earth demands it! Blood! it fattens
her like dew!

6.

Up! be merry! never think! Eat and drink! eat
and drink!

In the hell of this existence make whatever heaven
ye can :

Clink your glasses, toast your lasses,

Be no longer God, but man !

Clink your glasses, toast your lasses, set the table in
a roar !

There's a vacant chair beside ye ; there's a shadow
on the floor,

And a knocking at the door !

Shout and drown it ! 'tis but fancy ; merry till your
dying breath ;

Merry in the teeth of Death !

Talk no longer of repentance ; once indeed — but
all is past :

Good or evil, 'tis no matter : we shall all be damned
at last !

VII.

I.

Peace, wild dreamer ! cease this raving ! 'tis a mad-
ness in the brain ;

Even were it true, why say it ? What will be the
end, the gain ?

Waves may murmur, thunders roll,

Silence is the only answer of a self-collected soul.

Though I fall, in darkness groping, I shall yet behold
the light ;

There are many gaping ruins in the temple of my
heart ;
But the holy light will enter like the tempest and the
night,
Beating on me, as I wander in the corridors apart !
In my youth I thought to perish : youth has gone,
and I remain ;
Some great flock will fall upon me, and will make
me calm again :
Nay, my calmness *is* returning : torture has not
wrung in vain.
Beauty stirs again my nature, not in suns and moons
alone,
But in thoughts that breathe repentance, and in
actions that atone :
Nature folds me to her bosom, in her unity enshrined,
Like a shell within the ocean, or a thought within
the mind.
Even Love, the dream, remaineth ; wears a kind of
hopeful smile :
I've no faith in his fulfilment, but he may remain
awhile !

2.

And mine the Paradise of books, the heaven of
classic lore ;
The dreams of sage philosophers, the songs of bards
of yore :

I brood upon their pages, and pen my own sweet
books,
Nor pine, for that is over, for woman's loving looks !
Sometimes a tone of music, an old familiar strain
Reminds me of my feelings, recalls my former pain :
Something about the organ, a shrill yet muffled tone,
A rich melodious fretfulness, a snarling silver moan :
But I rarely heed its sorrow, I know its syren charms ;
Nor need I listen to it, for in my listening brain
Is many a richer strain,
Lays to bury Youth to, or rouse the world in arms !
So armed with calm endurance I frame my glowing
lays,
Embalming in forgetfulness the burden of my days !

3.

And when the days are ended, and come the dusky
nights,
Glimmering in my chamber, I let my fancy roam ;
Watching from the window the twinkling city lights,
The people going home !
I cross my neighbor's threshold, and softly mount
the stairs,
But for all my stealthy creeping, no step of mine
is missed ;
For the wifely face surprises me, like a vision, un-
awares,

And the little ones run to me, to be taken up and
kissed !
The dear old feelings waken, the sad old times
return ;
Perchance I shed a tear or two, or heave a stifled
sigh :
But the cheerful merry lamp comes in, the merry
fagots burn,
And I put the darkness by !

4.

Then come the long and dreamy nights, the hours
of classic ease ;
What honey-throated Plato says, and what Mæonides ;
The songs I sing, the books I pen, the thought I
undergo ;
That sweet laborious idleness that poets only know !
I keep the watches of the night, the deeper hours of
morn,
Till o'er the silent sea of sleep my spirit's bark is
borne !
Save when the melancholy wind is moaning in the
street,
When falls the rain upon the roof, when drives the
icy fleet ;
Or when the mournful midnight bell awakes its
funeral toll,

And shakes the air, as o'er its waves the iron echoes
roll ;

Then stare I on the dying lamp, the embers on the
hearth,

The thickening gloom, the empty room, and grow
alone on earth ;

Then turn I in my restless bed, and feel upon my
breast

A weight like lead, and not the head, the heart that
there should rest !

And in my dreams I seem to drift along a barren
land,

Where strikes the moon on ruined walls, where
muffled figures stand :

The waves are laid, the winds are still, yet over all
the shore

There haunts a voice, there broods a shape, the
awful Nevermore !

VIII.

I.

Nevermore? The dream was idle ! Even slumber
can deceive,

If it meant not, (still deceiving!) that I nevermore
can grieve :

But perchance I heard it wrongly, as I drifted from
the shore ;

'Twas not *Never*, only *Ever*—only *Ever, Evermore!*
With your hand in mine, I think so; from your
 kisses, dear, I know it;
 Sleeping in your fond embraces will assure, and
 set the seal:
If there be a deeper knowledge, I am willing to
 forego it,
 Deeper raptures, I renounce them, so divine are
 those I feel!

2.

Every moment of existence since we met comes up
 before me;
Waves of dim remembered feeling, seas of memory
 sweeping o'er me:
By the sea, as now, my darling! by the very sea
 that lies
Pallid in the moonlight yonder, with the wonder in
 its eyes;
In this very bridal chamber did we lift, as now, the
 veil,
And reveal our inmost natures, both so beautiful and
 pale!
When I said "my youth is wafted," when I moaned
 "my manhood dies!"
When I wept "I love you, lady!" and awaited your
 replies,
You but clutched my hand the closer, you but seized
 me by the arm,

As if you would pull me to you, or would hurry me
from harm :

(Were you thinking of the ocean? were you tramp-
ing in the sand?)

But I understood the gesture, my heart clenched you
like a hand ;

Clenched you with a hand of iron, either to possess
you there,

Or to plunge you in the ocean of its old and new
despair!

Then I rose and paced the chamber, scarcely know-
ing where I trod,

Very daring in my curses, very humble in my
prayers ;

Now a demon, now a god,

And you paced with like emotion in my footsteps
unawares!

3.

Past the night in troubled visions, came the morn,
but came as calm

As the Sabbath days in Eden, and we walked
along the shore ;

Silent where the solemn ocean poured his everlasting
psalm,

But our spirits talked the more!

And at noon in summer quiet at your feet I read my
songs,

Trailing in my hand your tresses, which were
dearer songs to me ;
And you praised me, gave me, sweetest, what to
Poesy belongs —
Kisses, where the crown should be !
Now my nature fell before you, in prostration new
and sweet,
Kissed the hem of your white garment, and your
spirit's whiter feet ;
Then rose up like one in frenzy, in the fever-throbs
of pain,
And devoured you with its glances, in a passionate
disdain !
Love ? and wherefore ? what the end ? Hands may
meet, and thoughts may blend,
But our lives are separated : there's a yawning
gulf between ;
Yet I know not, youth is flying : you are wafting,
I am dying ;
Loving, what should intervene ?
Lay your head upon my bosom, where a falling kiss
may find it ;
Knit your fingers now in mine, love, and in
silence remain ;
If I suffer, never mind it,
Be you happy, fool your fancy ; we can both be
wise again !

Now, the only wisdom's loving; parting now the
only pain!

Lift your face, and let me kiss it, from your brow
and cheek so pale,

Wandering to your mouth, belovéd, where I hang
with stifled breath;

Draining all its hoard of sweetness, till in utter bliss
I fail,

Dropping from you, nigh to Death!

4.

But that morning when we parted — ah! what agony
and pain!

Worlds on worlds would never tempt me to be
tortured so again!

Still within this very chamber, where yon window
clips the moon,

(But the sky was bright with sunlight, and the air
was warm with June!)

There we stood that fatal morning, with such horrid
aches of heart,

Bent on parting, but unwilling, nay, unable, love,
to part,

Till I tore you from my bosom, flung you off, I know
not where,

Rushing in the mocking sunlight, and the curséd,
curséd air,

Where my tortures seemed to rise,
Growing from my heart in mountains till they over-
topped the skies!
Then the dull reaction followed, settling on my
barren brain,
Like a dreary day in autumn on a weary waste of
plain :
Every thing was shrouded to me : Joy herself, on
such a day,
Must have come to me like Sorrow, in her livery of
gray !

5.

What will now become of me ? You are yonder by
the sea
Pining, (are you not, beloved ?) I am in the sea
of men ;
You have friends, a stately birth : I am all alone on
earth ;
Leagues, and poverty between us, will you think
of me again ?
Everywhere, in Art and Nature, you diffuse your soul
around ;
In the books I read no longer, blurring all the
mifty lines ;
In the heavenly sea of music freighted with a richer
sound ;
In the sunlight, in the moonlight, and in every
star that shines :

And when midnight tempests gather I behold you
in the gloom,
Rushing through the fiery darkness, in a cloud of
whiteest light ;
And mine arms strike out like lightnings, to embrace
you, and consume,
But I only grasp the night !
Yet methinks, such links have bound you, and so
far my passion flies,
You *must* feel my arms around you, and *must* see my
burning eyes !

6.

Yes, and when, as now, the moonlight through the
snowy curtain falls,
Creeps upon the tufted carpet in a diamond slab
of panes,
Sleeps amid the lilac shadows waving on the dreamy
walls,
Still my soul with you remains !
Bends above you as you slumber in your chastity
apart,
Smooths the tresses from your forehead, lifts the
cross from off your breast,
And lies down upon your heart,
In a perfect, perfect rest !
Else within my little chamber, in a dream, I see you
stand,

With a rose-bud in your bosom, and a lily in your
hand ;

Gliding to my warm embraces, in my loving breast
you creep,

Till I wake, and find you vanished in the Paradise
of Sleep !

Sleeping, you rejoin me soon :

We are dead, are spirits only ; climb the viewless
rounds of air ;

Full to heaven your brow is lifted, like the crescent
of the moon,

While your eyes are yearning earthward through the
shadows of your hair !

And you kiss my tearful eyelids as we climb the
starry deep,

For I fall in utter sorrow, dear one, on your neck,
and weep !

7.

Oh ! what letters passed between us, and what
subtle thrills they woke !

Had we not fulfilled them wholly, why, our very
hearts had broke !

For myself, they were my being, and to-night I had
not been,

Save but for your letters, sweetest, and the sweetest
love therein !

Kisses on the superscription, fingers trembling in the
seal,

Broken with the haste of passion, and with passion's secret fear ;
Even the simple writing thrilled me, made my dazzled senses reel,
While I slowly wrung its meaning, never at the moment clear :
Hanging on the lightest phrases, as a lover only can,
Sounding all the deeps of feeling, I grew more and more a man !
Daily, hourly to the eastward, to the margin of the sea,
Did I breathe divinest kisses, did I send my soul to thee ;
And my kisses met their sisters, your dear kisses, everywhere,
Nay, myself, I seemed to meet them, felt your warm lips pursed in air !

8.

But that night, can I forget it? that delicious night in spring,
When we pledged our hands, so hopeless, where our hearts were pledged before,
When we gave ourselves, undaunted, to each other, evermore,
Into Love's serene dominions soaring as with angel wing!

Not for us the shade and silence the betrothal hour
demands ;

Round us buzzed the idle talkers, o'er us blazed
the chandeliers ;

There was nothing to the seeming in our interchange
of hands,

But it cancelled all the sorrow of our separated
years !

Flushed with passion and ambition, when I left you
there alone,

Through the silent city moving, in the sleeping
streets apart,

Reddest roses bloomed before me, over me the
morning shone,

Marching to the stately music of my own tri-
umphant heart :

Splendors on my brow and face,

Heaven itself rose up before me, as the great world
dipped in space !

9.

Then our hours of stolen sweetness, with their
maddening incompleteness ;

Both so loath and yet so eager, souls of mingled
snow and fire ;

Each its cup of passion filling, then in dust the nectar
spilling,

Though a burning thirst consumed us, and a fever
of desire !
Often in my little chamber at your feet I knelt in
prayer,
With my clasped hands imploring, till you raised
me from your feet ;
Then I hid within your bosom, and unlooped your
falling hair,
While your arms were locked around me, till I
felt their pulses beat !
With a kiss upon my eyelids, and a mist within my
eyes,
Fixed on yours in steeping passion, I returned
your sweet embrace ;
And my heart leaped up within me in a sudden storm
of sighs,
And I poured a rain of kisses on your brow, and
eyes, and face !
Then, your white throat in my fingers, and a tingling
in their tips,
Wild with love I fastened on you, and I grew around
your lips ;
Every atom of my body felt the hunger of my heart,
I was mad to crush, and kill you, and to tear your
limbs apart !

10.

But all this, the joy and glory of my glad exulting
spirit,

Was as nothing to the morning when we stood so
meek and grand,
In the chapel, hand in hand,
Each the vast "*I will!*" responding where the
blessed God might hear it!
Nor was that, although it raised us to the very gates
of light,
Half so lofty, and so holy, as our wedded love to
night;
Sitting in the happy silence, with our hands together
prest,
I caress you, wife, and bless you, as you lie upon my
breast;
Dreaming in our bridal chamber, in the sainted moon
asleep,
With the starry spaces o'er us, and before the listen-
ing deep,
Till we turn to God above,
And demand a benediction — "FATHER! LOVE US,
FOR WE LOVE!"

1853.





I LAY his picture on my knee,
The knee he loves to sit upon ;
It is the image of my son,
And, like the child, a world to me.

He fronts me in a little chair,
In careless ease, and quiet grace,
A courtly deference in his face,
A glory in his shining hair :

An infant prince, a baby king,
To whom his ministers relate
Some intricate affair of state :
He hears, and weighs the smallest thing.

Not twice has summer come and gone
Since he was born, a summer-child ;
Two Junes have on his cradle smiled,
A rose of June without a thorn.

I stood beside his mother's bed
When he was born, at dead of night ;
My heart grew faint with its delight ;
I heard his cry : he was not dead !

And she, his mother, dearer far
Than this poor life of mine can be,
She lives : she weeps : she clings to me,
Her dim eye brightening like a star !

We heard his low uncertain moan ;
In both our souls it smote a chord
Not reached by Love's divinest word ;
It stirred, and stirs to him alone.

" *We have a child !* " We smiled and wept ;
He slept : God's Angel in the dark
Pushed down the stream his little bark,
And with it ours : with him we slept.

At last the lingering summer passed ;
The summer passed, the autumn came,
The dying woods were all a-flame,
The leaves were whirling in the blast :

He lived ; our loving spirits wore
A royal diadem of joy ;

Time laid his hands upon the boy,
And day by day he ripened more.

His dreamy eye grew like the sky,
A liquid blue, half dark, half bright ;
Now like the noon, and now like night,
With silver planets sown on high :

His thin white ringlets turn to gold,
And gleam like suns on autumn eves ;
Or like the sober autumn sheaves,
Whose strawy fires are faint and cold.

His noble brow, his placid look,
The subtle sweetness of his smile —
They touch, but fly my simple style ;
The child is like a Poet's book :

A rare conception, richly planned ;
Harmonious, perfect in its parts :
Going straight home to all men's hearts,
An easy thing to understand !

Sweet wife ! we understand the child ;
We know that he is fair and good :
As good as fair : no vice of blood
To mar him : neither weak, nor wild.

I take his picture from my knee,
And press it to my lips again :
I see an hundred in my brain,
And all of him, and dear to me.

He nestles in his nurse's arms,
His young eyes winking in the light :
I hear his sudden shriek at night,
Startled in dreams by vague alarms ;

We walk the floor, and hush his moan ;
Again he sleeps : we kiss his brow.
I toss him on my shoulder now,
His Majesty is on the throne !

His kingly clutch is in my hair ;
He sees a rival in the glass :
It stares, and passes as we pass ;
It fades. I breathe the country air :

I see a cottage leagues from here ;
A garden near ; some orchard trees :
A leafy glimpse of creeping seas ;
And in the cottage something dear :

A square of sunlight on the floor,
Blocked from the window ; in the square

A happy child with heavenly hair,
To whom the world is more and more.

He sees the blue fly beat the pane,
 Buzzing away the noon-tide hours ;
 The terrace grass, the scattered flowers,
The beetles, and the beads of rain :

He sees the gravelled walk below,
 The narrow arbor draped with vines ;
 The light that like an emerald shines,
The small bird hopping to and fro.

He drinks their linked beauty in ;
 They fill his thought with silent joy :
 But now he spies a late-dropped toy,
And all his noisy pranks begin.

They bear him to an upper room,
 When comes the eve ; he hums for me,
 Like some voluptuous drowsy bee,
That flutters his wings in honied gloom.

I see a shadow in a chair ;
 I see a shadowy cradle go ;
 I hear a ditty, soft and low :
The mother and the child are there !

At length the balm of sleep is shed ;
One bed contains my bud and flower :
They sleep, and dream, and hour by hour
Goes by, while angels watch the bed.

Sleep on, and dream, ye blessed pair !
My prayers shall guard ye night and day ;
Ye guard me so, ye make me pray :
Ye make my happy life a prayer !

Dream on ! dream on ! and in your dreams
Remember me ; I love ye well :
I love ye more than tongue can tell,
Dear Souls ! and ere the morning beams

My soul shall strike your trail of sleep,
In some enchanted, holy place,
And fold ye in a fond embrace,
And kiss ye till with bliss I weep !

1856.





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